

Watling View School

Watling View, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 2NU

Inspection dates

21–22 June 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher works relentlessly to improve all aspects of the school. Working closely with the senior leaders and staff, she has ensured that teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now good.
- Leadership and management are good. Leaders, including governors, have a clear and accurate view of the school. The work completed to develop the strong leadership team means that the capacity for further improvement is good.
- The knowledgeable governing body has a clear, concise and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors hold leaders to account for the quality of their work.
- Pupils' work and the school's accurate records indicate that pupils' progress has improved well this year. Pupils make good progress throughout the school.
- The school's ethos and vision promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. These aspects are effectively developed through the curriculum. Staff know pupils well and have high expectations of them.
- Behaviour is good. Positive attitudes to learning, and enjoyment of school, are apparent in all that pupils do. Pupils say that they feel safe in this positive learning environment.
- Well-planned transition into and out of the school gives pupils good opportunities to make the most of their time at Watling View. They leave well prepared for the next steps in learning and adult life.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- While leaders are making good progress in improving the school, they do not move on quickly enough when action has been taken and improvements achieved.
- Staff sometimes focus too much on what pupils need to do rather than on meeting their learning needs. When this happens, pupils' learning slows.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching so that more pupils make rapid progress by making sure that:
 - teachers and support staff focus on improving pupils' learning so that each lesson helps pupils learn from what they have done before.
- Improve the quality and impact of leadership by:
 - training the new middle and senior leaders so they can monitor, evaluate and drive improvement in the areas they are responsible for to ensure that they have a full and detailed understanding of current practice to inform improvements
 - ensuring that expectations for improvement are set out explicitly in planning, and linked to the school improvement plan
 - holding leaders to account for fulfilling their identified responsibilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since her appointment, the headteacher has worked relentlessly to improve all aspects of the school's work. With the support of her senior team, she confidently sets high expectations for improvements to be made well and quickly. There is a positive culture across the school, strategically led by governors, in which staff are expected to develop and are supported to do so.
- The introduction of regular pupils' progress meetings means that senior leaders have the information they need to challenge and develop staff. The positive atmosphere, created by the rapidly developing leadership team, permeates all aspects of the school's work. Staff morale is high and staff are positive about their roles in moving the school forward. This atmosphere of support, trust and respect also supports the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- School leaders' and governors' monitoring of planned developments means that they have an accurate view of what the school does well and how it can be improved. It results in the identification of the right improvement priorities. Leaders' and governors' work is well focused and is leading to rapid improvement. For example, the introduction and development of a range of strategies to support staff in teaching communication and literacy skills has seen a rapid increase in the number of pupils who can now read independently. However, leaders have not yet used their analysis of what they do well to further inform their planning. This means that the rate of improvement is not as rapid as it could be.
- Leadership roles have been allocated across the school. New responsibilities are understood by the staff but some have had insufficient time to take action. Teachers have responsibility for improving teaching in their classrooms and work well together to ensure that this is happening quickly. Subject leaders have been identified for mathematics and English, and both have been instrumental in rapidly improving the quality of teaching across the school. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is now good.
- A member of the senior leadership team has developed positive partnership working with other schools. This includes a number of the local primary schools. These schools are being helped to develop their assessment systems and strategies for supporting pupils with significant needs in a mainstream environment.
- When pupils are identified as needing a place in this specialist school, they are often already known to the outreach staff. As a result, staff have good information about those who will be attending, and transition into the school is well managed.
- New leaders are creative in their work to engage pupils' families and siblings, for example through the mathematics parent workshops. Parents say that they can use these skills out in the wider community and at home to help their children better understand key skills such as calculating with money. Activities with pupils' siblings effectively support them to understand how to help their brother or sister and to understand how to help others to treat them equally.
- The curriculum is well planned to match pupils' needs. Through the cultural activities and leaders' desire to hear what pupils say they need, there is a clear emphasis on promoting British values such as tolerance and democracy. These values are evident in lessons and are apparent in the displays around the school. Pupils were excited to be voting to choose their head boy or head girl, and had clear ideas about who they might choose and why.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance has improved since the last inspection. The strong governing body under the positive leadership of the chair has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and of the areas needing development.
 - Governors use regular visits and learning walks to check what the headteacher tells them, and assure themselves of the accuracy of the information they receive. As a result, they have a good understanding of the extent to which teaching has improved since the last inspection.
 - The governing body has a wide range of knowledge, skills and expertise, which results in governors being able to lead strategic development well.
 - Senior and middle leaders ensure that governors understand pupils' learning, and this is beginning to enable governors to have a clearer insight into how particular groups of pupils are progressing. However, this information does not inform the school development plan sufficiently well for governors to use this plan to challenge leaders and to hold them to account.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The leadership of child protection is good because records show that those responsible ensure that staff take appropriate action to identify pupils and families who may be at risk. They then secure appropriate internal and external support as soon as they can. Leaders' dated records show that staff and governors have current child protection training which meets statutory requirements.
- While the school does all it can to make best use of the building, leaders are faced with a potential safeguarding issue because classrooms have inadequate space to store wheelchairs and other equipment. Consequently, they are stored in the corridors. Because of the limited space, this poses an accident risk to pupils as they pass by. Leaders have made the local authority aware of this risk.
- Pupils attend regularly and are happy to come to school. Leaders and governors, through their regular visits, have a knowledge of how pupils feel and what they think works well at their school. Pupils are trusting of the adults who work with them and feel valued. Staff ensure that any risks are appropriately managed, giving pupils the opportunity to be as independent as possible. These risks are well identified and rigorously assessed. All staff and governors know that safeguarding is a priority.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including in the early years, has significantly improved since the previous inspection.
- Teachers and teaching assistants use their detailed knowledge of pupils' likes, dislikes and needs to encourage pupils to think for themselves and be as independent as possible. The majority of teachers plan very carefully so that the needs of different pupils, including the most able, are met. This is particularly evident when teaching those with the most complex needs.
- Teachers are held to account for the outcomes and progress made by the pupils they teach. Through the extra support they have been given, teachers quickly identify and support pupils whose progress stalls. They put in place interventions which rapidly move pupils on in their learning. Because it is relatively new, this assessment is not well managed in all areas of the school. Some teachers do not identify the most appropriate next steps for pupils' learning quickly enough.
- Teachers value and measure all small steps of progress. Where practice is at its best, for example, through access to creative and physical learning opportunities, pupils are developing their understanding of such concepts as 'full' and 'empty'. Their progress in their learning is well recorded alongside their ability to approach this task independently.
- Each pupil has individualised targets which detail the high expectations of the teacher. Teachers' planning explains ways to explore this concept further, helping the teaching assistants to make best use of the time.
- Teachers' detailed planning supports pupils to make progress at a pace appropriate to their personal circumstances and to develop their life skills, including their independence. For example, recent developments in the delivery of training to enable pupils to successfully travel around their community independently have led to pupils being able to make their first solo trips.
- All staff know their pupils very well. The strength of positive relationships pupils establish both with staff and their peers enables them to interact and engage happily in learning activities. They also allow pupils to take risks in new environments or when doing new things. During the inspection, pupils with complex needs were observed being willing to jump towards staff in a swimming pool for the first time. They were rightly proud of this achievement and delighted to try again, this time jumping even further.
- Pupils with the most complex needs gain from a curriculum which is inclusive and ensures that all relevant skills are taught. Teachers make sure that pupils have the opportunity to develop skills and make their own choices independently. Pupils clearly trust staff to support them and are confident in the support they receive. As a result, they make very rapid progress.
- Because of the improvements in teaching, pupils are given opportunities to achieve external academic and vocational qualifications alongside those awarded by the school, including in both English and mathematics.
- To ensure that their assessment of pupils' learning is accurate, teachers check the assessments they make with other teachers in school and also with teachers from other specialist provision. Teachers use this work to analyse how well pupils are learning and to plan for their next steps with care and attention to detail.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' transition into the school is well thought through by staff who take the time to visit pupils and their families in their own homes and in their previous provision. This ensures that staff obtain a detailed understanding of the individual needs of each pupil, including their likes and support mechanisms. As a result, pupils are well supported from the moment they start at the school.
- The school has effective links with external agencies, including school nurses and occupational therapy. School staff make effective use of the training made available to them so that they are well able to support the varied and changing needs of pupils most effectively.
- Pupils say they feel happy and safe in school. They enjoy being with their friends and say they make them happy. One pupil shared, 'I have lots of opportunities to go out into the community, for example to go shopping and buy food.' One pupil went on to explain that, with support from his friends, the purchased food is then used in the food technology lessons. In these lessons, staff make sure that pupils are safe in the kitchen, teaching them how to use equipment safely and as independently as possible.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff have clear expectations of pupils' behaviour. All pupils are expected to respond appropriately to staff instructions. These high expectations are encouraged by staff who have good signing skills and who use a wide range of other strategies to ensure that pupils have the best opportunities to communicate. As a result, pupils participate consistently in their learning and are determined to achieve.
- Pupils play happily and safely together and use the playground equipment under careful supervision. Staff engage pupils in actively learning and developing their social skills, including out on the playground. Pupils are encouraged to participate by playing alongside others even if they are not able to join in with them. Pupils say that they enjoy their time on the playground where they feel safe playing with their friends and with staff and where they 'laugh lots'. However, the excellent signing which was seen around the school is not as apparent on the playground, so sometimes pupils do not get every chance to practise their communication skills.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Rates of progress in pupils' learning have improved well since the previous inspection, and all groups of pupils now make at least good progress. Some groups, for example those with the most complex needs, make even better progress. Because leaders use the extra funding provided by the pupil premium effectively, disadvantaged pupils also make good progress in their learning. There is no gap between the progress of these pupils and others. The most able pupils make good progress from their starting points. The curriculum provides appropriate support to ensure that these pupils are challenged to achieve the best outcomes they can.
- Pupils across the school, including children in the early years and students following 16 to 19 study programmes, are making good progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science. This is because teaching meets pupils' needs well.
- Pupils make particularly strong progress in reading. This is as a result of the recent development in the teaching of phonics. There are good opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to use and practise their reading skills.
- Pupils make good progress in communication skills at a level which is appropriate to their needs and abilities. There are lots of opportunities for pupils to learn and practise how they communicate. These opportunities help pupils to rapidly develop increasing powers of independence.
- Students leave the sixth form well prepared for the next stage of education or employment, having gained a range of appropriate skills and qualifications.

Early years provision

is good

- The early years curriculum is planned across the children's experiences at school. The way it is planned enables children to make choices for themselves as soon as they are able. Staff value and respond to every tiny step of progress. The early years leader ensures that provision is well planned to meet the wide range of children's needs equally well across both classes.
- Children are safe and fully engaged in their learning activities. The adult to child ratio is appropriate and enables assessment to be effectively used to offer appropriate support and challenge to each child.
- Children's work demonstrates that consistent progress is being made over time. Children achieve good outcomes. Records of progress for the early years children are detailed. Staff regularly add additional comments which demonstrate the steps of progress children make, however small. However, these records too often take the form of diary entries which focus on activities children have completed rather than the progress in learning they have achieved.
- Children in the early years are taught well. On arrival at the school, children's needs are carefully assessed so that staff are able to ensure that they do all they can to best meet these needs.
- Staff identify the initial steps in learning that children need to make to progress well. They are used to guide staff on how to manage children most effectively during whole-class and small-group teaching sessions. They also encourage staff to ensure that children, however extensive their needs, gain from opportunities to work and play independently. Children benefit from the good range of learning opportunities offered by staff, both inside the classroom and out in the play area. As a result, the children make good progress.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Students aged 16 to 19 are educated in mixed groups with others who have similar needs. This enables them to access the teaching they need to maximise their understanding and learning. Progress of students following 16 to 19 study courses is good.
- Students typically transition out of the school at post-19. They go on to appropriate courses at local or specialist colleges. The school supports the students and their families to make choices which best suit their current needs. As a result, there are positive planned endings for young people leaving the school. In addition, the school's strong communication links with the colleges means that they know that students typically continue to be successful at college, maintaining their places and gaining additional qualifications or certificates.

School details

Unique reference number	117683
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10008128

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	89
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Josephs
Headteacher	Pauline B Atkins
Telephone number	01727 850560
Website	www.watlingviewschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@watlingview.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	30–31 January 2014

Information about this school

- Watling View provides for pupils who have severe learning difficulties and those who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. A number of pupils also have autistic spectrum disorders.
- Located on the southern side of central St Albans, the school's stated aim is to 'offer our students a safe, dynamic and highly individualised education appropriate to each person's level of ability'.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils who are supported through the pupil premium, which is government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after, is average.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language are broadly average.
- A teacher from the school provides outreach support on behalf of the local authority on two days a week, supporting up to 57 local primary schools.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Post-16 students are taught in mixed-year class groups. The comments in the main sections of the report are inclusive of post-16 provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other representatives of the senior team, including those newly appointed.
- Meetings were held with members of the teaching staff, middle leaders and a range of pupils and governors.
- Inspectors observed pupils in classrooms, at breaktime and lunchtime, and as they moved around the school.
- Pupils' work was reviewed. Recent progress information was discussed, and safeguarding documentation and other records scrutinised.
- Inspectors reviewed responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which collects parents' views about the school's work. They also took into account information shared by parents through a telephone conversation.

Inspection team

Mary Rayner, lead inspector

Susan Heptinstall

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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