



Furze Down School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110585
LEA Buckinghamshire LEA
Inspection number 278459
Inspection dates 7 February 2006 to 8 February 2006
Reporting inspector Judith Charlesworth AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Verney Road
School category	Community		Winslow
Age range of pupils	5 to 19		Buckingham MK18 3BL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01296 713385
Number on roll	114	Fax number	01296 714420
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Pat Caulfield
Date of previous inspection	3 April 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Sue Collins

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Furze Down School caters for pupils aged 5 - 19 with an increasingly wide range of special educational needs. The predominant groups are moderate learning difficulties, behavioural-social-emotional difficulties (BSED), language and communication difficulties, autism and severe learning difficulties. The younger pupils tend to have the most complex needs. Most of the pupils are white British with about one fifth of pupils from five other heritages. The school is due to take only secondary-age pupils in September 2007 and there are currently only 13 pupils in Years 1 to 6. The post-16 department has 31 students. The school has recently internally reorganised into learning centres, each of which provides for pupils with specific learning and age-related needs.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Recognised by external monitoring as very effective since its last inspection in 2000, the school has gone from strength to strength in the past year. A new strategy for improvement and internal re-organisation to better meet the needs of its changing group of pupils have been highly successful. Furze Down is now a very exciting and innovative school. It knows how well it is doing because of its extensive self-evaluation processes, although it is sometimes too modest because it knows, rightly, that its development work will never be finished. The school has identified the need, for example, to check that the new cross-curricular activities meet all the requirements for the individual subjects. Pupils' achievement and personal development are outstanding. This is due to the exceptional quality of leadership and management which, in turn, have: promoted high quality teaching and learning; an innovative curriculum that motivates pupils to engage and learn; robust and rigorous assessment procedures to underpin planning for subjects, lessons and individuals; placed the individual's personal development as central to the learning process and successfully managed to support, enthuse and motivate staff to take full ownership and responsibility for the school's strategic direction. The school provides very good value for money. It is very clear about where it is going, and how it should get there. It has addressed the weaknesses identified in the last inspection very thoroughly, and its capacity for continued improvement is very good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The school judges the post-16 department to be good, but inspection findings show that it is excellent. This is because it is focused on giving students the skills they need to take charge of their own adult lives and particularly to continue their learning. The department achieves this through a very well-constructed curriculum which meets each individual's own needs and interests. The curriculum has a strong focus on supporting students' personal development. It gives very good opportunities for a wide range of accredited learning, supports students effectively in work experience and work-related learning, and includes good opportunities for them to follow college courses. Students' achievement is excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

* Analyse the content of cross-curricular activities to confirm that pupils are taught all the required elements of each subject. * Work with the local authority to improve the accommodation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is excellent. Each pupil is set challenging subject and personal targets, based on rigorous, frequent assessment of their skills, knowledge and understanding. The process starts with an extensive baseline assessment when pupils first join the school. Each assessment leads straight to the next set of targets. Pupils' performance is tracked and analysed and plans put into place to help them achieve as effectively as possible. This can include an individualised timetable or extra personal support to help them overcome particular difficulties, such as challenging behaviour. The school also sets whole-school targets for each cohort, such as improvements in reading age or accreditation. These targets are compiled as a result of the analysis of individuals' performance, and so vary year on year. The school is careful to analyse performance data to check on the progress and achievement of different groups in the school, for example boys or pupils from minority ethnic groups. All groups are making excellent progress. External validation confirms pupils' excellent achievement. Standards attained in national tests are well below national averages, but nevertheless show that pupils have attained very well given their starting points. The progress scores calculated by the Local Authority for pupils between 11 and 15 years are above average. Students achieve very well in accredited courses at the age of 16, with some gaining two GCSE passes and also at the end of their post-16 education where some, for example, gain National Vocational Qualifications in catering.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

This aspect is outstanding due to the school's absolute commitment to putting pupils' well-being at the centre of its work. Pupils' attitudes to work are very good because they enjoy what they are doing. They develop a sense of pride and self-esteem as their achievements are celebrated and they gain the skills needed to take their place in society. Pupils respond very well to the rewards and sanctions systems; this shows on their faces when their effort and behaviour are reviewed at the end of every lesson. Pupils' behaviour is good, and often excellent, but challenges by pupils with BSED are nevertheless evident at times. Exclusions are decreasing rapidly due to the implementation of effective strategies for behaviour management and individual pupil support. Attendance is below the national average, but figures are adversely affected by a small number with significant social and medical needs. The school goes to great lengths to promote pupils' personal development and well-being through everyday life, and through a wide range of very carefully planned and monitored activities and practices. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Cultural development, for example, is currently being reinforced by a through-school topic on Africa. Cultural studies are a permanent feature on the post-16 timetable. Pupils understand about healthy lifestyles and choices, and how to adopt safe practices. They give back to the community through a range of charitable activities, organised by the effective school council, and develop the skills and confidence needed to contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching is outstanding. All teaching observed in the inspection was either good or excellent. Pupils learn very well because planning is thorough and underpinned by very clear targets and aims. Pupils know their own personal targets and are reminded about them as necessary. Lesson aims are made explicit at the start of every lesson. All lessons contribute to the school's practical philosophy that pupils should know and understand given things at the end of a set period of time, and that they will be assessed to check that this has been achieved. The results of these assessments feed directly into further targets and aims. This helps pupils learn and make progress very effectively. Teachers are generally expert at meeting individuals' needs and at supporting their learning and positive attitudes through relevant, interesting activities. For example, pupils with autistic spectrum disorder were truly interested in an investigation of sheep's hearts, and remained calm and focused throughout the lesson. This helped them recount and develop their already considerable knowledge about the respiratory system. Good use is made of computer technology to help pupils learn. Team work between staff and relationships in class are very good. Teaching assistants are very well briefed and support individuals and groups confidently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is excellent. Pupils in Years 1 to 9 years follow the appropriate statutory curriculum. The school has taken advantage of the opportunity to be creative with the curriculum for the pupils in Years 10, 11 and post-16 and it has a very good emphasis on preparing pupils for their future. The school has carefully considered how best to group pupils to help them learn most effectively. The basic curriculum has been adapted to meet the prime needs of these groups very successfully; planning is thorough and extensive. Furthermore, pupils do not necessarily have all their lessons in their own learning centres and join those in a different centre when this is beneficial. For example, two 13 year old pupils with BSED join a similarly-aged group with communication difficulties for science. The school is developing more innovative ways of grouping subjects to provide a richer experience for pupils so that they learn better. For example, cross-curricular topic work involves the whole school and brings subjects together under particular themes, supported by visiting artists and specialists. The current theme is Africa. This is excellent support for pupils' educational and personal development. Pupils in the 'Nurture Centre' have a core curriculum of subjects such as English and mathematics in the morning and more of an emphasis on personal development in the afternoons through subjects such as art and design, music, and personal, social, health and citizenship education. However, these activities are not carefully matched to the requirements for the subjects covered. Social communication and emotional literacy lessons to support pupils' language and emotional development have been successfully

established. Very occasionally, communication in everyday lessons is not sufficiently well supported by signing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

There is an outstanding commitment to giving pupils equal opportunities for learning and for achieving as much as possible. Staff know pupils very well and monitor their personal development, behaviour and achievement rigorously. Each pupil is considered as an individual and appropriate educational and personal support and plans are put into place to help them achieve as well as possible. Pupils' views are sought in various ways and acted upon, individually and collectively. The staff ensure pupils are fully involved and responsible for their own behaviour and learning by sharing all plans and targets with them. Rewards and sanctions are clear and pupils respond very well to the system. As a result behaviour is improving, exclusions are decreasing and pupils are achieving better than previously. The school has thorough safeguarding procedures and it works effectively with other agencies such as social services; regular speech and language therapy and occupational therapy provide very well for pupils' specific needs. Child protection procedures are well established and staff are appropriately trained. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school. They are kept well-informed about their children's progress, and the school supports them in times of difficulty, and in the choices they and their children must make when it is time to leave

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The school is expertly led by the acting headteacher and deputy, with support and guidance from the governing body. Every structure and system is focused on reinforcing and sustaining performance, improvement and success. The school places the well-being of its staff at the same level as that of its pupils. All staff are equally valued and have equal opportunities for professional development. This has created a climate of support and respect, which in turn meant that the leadership team and senior managers' innovative plans for a renewed strategic direction for the school had full support. This led to the successful implementation of a new school organisation and management structure, in which every single person employed by the school has their own clearly defined responsibility for taking it forward. The staff's personal action plans form the basis of their performance management. The ultimate goal is the best possible achievement and preparation for adult life of the pupils. Staff members are entirely enthusiastic about the school, and the part they will play in its continued development. The governing body is fully involved in setting the strategic direction for the school, and for monitoring its progress and the school's effectiveness. The new arrangements are very effectively driven by the robust performance management of all staff and rigorous, all-encompassing self-evaluation of its processes. For example, the analysis of performance data in past years contributed to the decision to re-organise into needs-led teaching groups because the school recognised that some pupils were not making

enough progress. Very little is implemented without the associated monitoring, evaluation, and development procedures, and self-evaluation is an on-going rather than intermittent process. Reporting structures are clear, with individuals reporting to their 'strategic groups' and on to the senior managers and governing body. Parents, pupils and other stakeholders are regularly consulted and their views are taken into account when planning improvements. Business functions, finance and administration are expertly managed by a 'home-grown' business manager. The school is equally capably supported by an enhanced information communication technology technician who provides high quality analysis of the information gathered to inform staff and governors and underpin development. Although the school has made the most of its accommodation, it is no longer fit for purpose. In particular, there is no suitable hall for physical education, and some of the classrooms are interlinked which is disruptive for pupils.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I'm sure you remember that I visited your school recently to see how well it was working and how well you were all doing. The school staff have been busy over the last few months doing the same thing, and the conclusion they came to is that Furze Down is a good school. I was very pleased indeed with what I found and I think a bit differently to the staff and governors. They are too modest. I think Furze Down is an excellent school!

I found that you make excellent progress, not only in what you learn, but also in your personal development. You really gain in confidence as you succeed at your work and it was great to see how capable, independent and well-equipped for adult life the students in the post-16 department are. I know that a few of you have difficulties in managing your behaviour, but you are clearly learning to do this because everyone's behaviour was really good whilst I was in school. Well done. In every class I went into, I could see that you were concentrating very well and were enjoying your work. This is because of the high quality teaching and support you get from the staff. I also think that they give you a really interesting range of things to do; the topic on Africa that you are working on in enrichment afternoons is great, isn't it.

Your school is really well led and managed and all the staff work exceptionally hard to make sure that you learn as much as you can and are as happy as possible. They are very successful in this. The main thing they can do to help you even more is to look carefully at your topic work to check that all the subjects you must study are fully included. Thank you very much for letting me sit in on your lessons. I could not have done my job nearly as well without your help and co-operation.