



Spring Common School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110946
Local Authority CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Inspection number 288811
Inspection dates 28–29 November 2006
Reporting inspector Janet Thompson HMI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	American Lane
School category	Community special		Huntingdon
Age range of pupils	2–19		Huntingdon PE29 1TQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01480 377403
Number on roll (school)	121	Fax number	01480 377405
Number on roll (6th form)	33		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Christine Gilder
		Headteacher	Chris Owen
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2002		

Age group 2–19	Inspection dates 28–29 November 2006	Inspection number 288811
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school serves a wide, mainly rural area centred on the market town of Huntingdon. Nearly 20% of the pupils are in receipt of free school meals and there are 11 pupils who do not have English as their first language. Three quarters of the pupils at the school have severe learning disabilities or autistic spectrum disorders, 10% have profound and multiple disabilities and the rest have moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Standards reached by pupils and students at the school are well below expectations for their age due to their complex needs. The school is currently being led by a part-time acting headteacher with part-time support from a leadership consultant.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

The school fails to provide an adequate standard of education. Pupils make unsatisfactory progress because too much teaching is inadequate. Many staff do not have high enough expectations of what the pupils can learn. Work is not challenging enough or planned sufficiently well to meet the different needs within classes. Assessment gives no indication of progress over time. Staff are therefore unable to build effectively on previous learning and underachievement cannot be identified quickly. The school has recognised the inaccuracy of assessment and has very recently started to moderate the levels used. Provision for the small number of pupils in the Foundation Stage is also inadequate. The lack of whole school monitoring and evaluation has led to individual staff interpreting systems in different ways. There is considerable inconsistency across the school with some pockets of satisfactory or good practice. The variability in effectiveness from class to class is also reflected by parents' views.

The school has made good links with mainstream schools that enhance the satisfactory curriculum for some pupils. Pupils' personal development and well being are satisfactory. Many pupils make considerable progress in their social skills and at times surpass expectations. However there is a group of pupils who are not given sufficient guidance and support in order to learn how to improve their behaviour. Care, guidance and support are inadequate. There is a concerning lack of consistency in the way in which staff teach children with complex needs. Some of the approaches observed during the inspection were unsuitable for the needs of the pupils. The school does not meet government recommendations for ensuring all staff have received accredited training in behaviour management when physical intervention may be required. Communication systems are not always used. Frequently pupils who would benefit from visual support have to rely on verbal instructions and adult support. Links with other professionals are suitably developed and this offers good support for some individuals and their families.

Leadership and management are inadequate and the school considers itself to be more effective than it is. Resources are not deployed effectively and the school does not provide value for money. The current structure of school leadership has been in place since September 2006. Lines of accountability and responsibility are unclear and the current team are only beginning to evaluate the school's effectiveness. There is a grave lack of information because there has not been enough monitoring. There has been suitable progress this term in ensuring procedures are updated but these have not been embedded in practice. The governors have tried to fulfil their statutory duties but have not been given accurate evidence on which to do this. Recent work has

ensured that terms of reference to ensure accountability have been drafted but these are not yet ratified by the full governing body.

There has been a considerable decline in the quality of provision since the last inspection. Although very recent action has begun to address some of the issues, the temporary nature of the leadership structure, lack of clear lines of accountability and rigour in monitoring means that the school's priorities are not being tackled effectively.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 4

Progress made by students in the sixth form is inadequate. In spite of the school's considerable and concerted efforts, the sixth form curriculum is limited by a lack of college links, and this means a very limited choice of subjects for students. The lack of breadth in opportunities for students reduces the achievements they can make. The school has rightly identified that there are limited opportunities for accreditation, and a need to develop the curriculum for students with the most complex needs, through extending sensory work and a specific focus on key literacy and numeracy skills. Progress made in the subjects on offer is variable. Food technology makes a good contribution to life skills and work related learning. Progress in personal, social and health education (PSHE) is satisfactory; however, progress in other basic skills is inadequate for too many students. Links with other agencies and the local community are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- As a matter of urgency address staff training and monitoring of procedures to ensure the management of behaviour is at least satisfactory at all times.
- Improve the quality of teaching and ensure effective assessment so that all pupils can make the best possible progress.
- Establish regular monitoring and rigorous evaluation so that there is a clear view of strengths and areas for development across the school.
- Refine leadership and management roles so that there are clear lines of accountability to ensure policy is consistently implemented.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 4

Progress made by pupils is inadequate although there are examples of individual successes. Too many pupils do not make the gains they should across the subjects. In lessons progress was too often inadequate. Higher achievers have insufficient challenge in all key stages. In lower school there is a lack of planning for pupils working at the lower performance levels. Assessment prior to 2006 was not moderated and data is unreliable. Pupils' records are incomplete, frequently not dated or annotated and show inadequate progress. Recent work by the school to analyse performance levels has highlighted the differences in perceptions by different staff. There has been no

moderation with other special schools. Different perceptions and assessment systems undermine the ability of teachers to build accurately on previous learning. There is significant variability across classes and therefore in some year groups or some lessons pupils make satisfactory or better progress because of the better quality of teaching. Progress made by students in the sixth form is similar to the rest of the school although achievement in PSHE is satisfactory and students make good progress in food technology and related life skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. The behaviour of most learners is reasonable and some behave extremely well in spite of the inconsistency in staff approaches. Relationships are usually good. Some pupils are able to express their good understanding of the needs of other pupils. The unsatisfactory care, guidance and support for pupils with challenging behaviour constrains their personal development. In lessons, the high level of adult support keeps pupils on task but hampers opportunities for pupils to practise independence in their learning.

The attendance of learners is good. Children communicate that they enjoy the social aspects of school, for example, the sports and clubs. However, their enjoyment of learning is diminished when they have to wait too long for others to understand. The good quality of teaching in food technology in the upper school prepares youngsters very well for their future education or life in the workplace. Students show delight in designing, making and hosting meals for guests. Until 2006, just under half of pupils took up further education and training post-16. However, evidence submitted by the school shows that this was considerably reduced for the small group that left this year. The inclusion project with a local mainstream school adds to pupils' enjoyment and contributes well to their personal development and social skills. The majority of pupils know how to stay safe. Most feel safe at school and have confidence in the support available if they feel at risk. Pupils learn how to stay healthy through regular exercise and can recognise healthy foods. The school council contributes to decision making although opportunities for this are irregular. In lessons, the pupils' views and opinions are not sought frequently enough.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are inadequate in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form, where an outstanding lesson was seen during the inspection. There is too much

inadequate teaching as a result of low expectations, a slow pace, and insufficient planning to meet varying levels of need within the class. Assessment is not used effectively to ensure pupils with different levels of ability are challenged. When teaching is satisfactory, although pupils make reasonable gains in learning, one part of the lesson is less effective. For example, the plenary being too rushed and so chances for pupils to review their learning are superficial. There are too few times when pupils learn independently. This situation is not helped by the lack of easy access for pupils to stimulating resources that are relevant to the focus of the lesson. In contrast the outstanding teaching was characterised by every moment being exploited to the full to enrich pupils' learning and enhance their personal development. Whilst the management of behaviour is inconsistent, good relationships between staff and pupils mean that in some classes there are no negative behaviour issues.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The curriculum in the main school is satisfactory but it is inadequate in the sixth form. In spite of a lack of subject leadership and planned opportunities for progression, teachers have maintained a broad and relevant curriculum. The curriculum does not give a consistent emphasis upon building pupils' skills through different activities. One effect of this is that pupils remark on their experience of repeating work too often in different years. Curriculum planning is under review but there are no subject leaders to drive forward necessary changes, so skills progression is not reliably assured. Opportunities to work with local mainstream schools effectively enhance the curriculum for some pupils. The quality of individual subjects on offer in the sixth form is satisfactory and at times good but there is insufficient breadth for the curriculum to be adequate.

Pupils' learning is enriched by the programme of visits, including residential trips for many, and visitors into school. A good variety of clubs is offered to pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 4

Care, guidance and support are inadequate. Staff are concerned for and care about pupils on a day to day basis, and most have good relationships with them. There is a lack of expertise to support the learning of pupils with the most complex needs. Staff do not have the necessary skills and understanding to manage difficult behaviour consistently across the school. Although resources exist to support pupils with complex needs moving from one activity to another, practice lacks consistency and too often is not supportive enough.

Procedures to ensure safety are not sufficiently robust. The quality and extent of risk assessment for individual pupils in specific situations are dependent upon individual teachers and not in place throughout the school as required. Recent training has

ensured that all staff have up to date child protection information and staff have a good knowledge of how to report concerns about youngsters. Staff are less clear about how to proceed if they have concerns about a colleague's behaviour. Academic guidance is constrained because of inconsistent and inaccurate assessment. More able students in the sixth form receive good quality guidance for their future lives.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 4

Leadership and management are inadequate. The current senior team, with help from the local authority (LA), have begun to identify some of the key areas for development. Already work has begun on making systems more robust and accountable.

Evaluation of the school's effectiveness is inadequate and significant difficulties in some areas of the school have not been identified. The school lacks priorities and focus for development. Governors and the LA are clear that neither the school's plans nor its self evaluation provide them with an agenda to prioritise improvements. There has been insufficient monitoring to ensure consistent implementation of policies and understanding of procedures. An inability to recruit suitably experienced staff to the senior management structure agreed by governors, has meant that responsibilities and lines of accountability are unclear. This leaves staff without clear guidance. There are no subject leaders in place, and draft teaching and learning responsibilities have not been agreed by the unions and therefore cannot be approved by the governors. The work required to ensure satisfactory provision has not been prioritised effectively and action has been too slow.

There are some good efforts to ensure all pupils have access to a range of experiences. However, not all pupils are able to make the best possible progress because of inadequacies in planning and assessment.

Governors have a good knowledge and understanding of the needs of the school but have been thwarted in their attempts to gain accurate information from the school in the past. In spite of requests by governors, policy documents have not been presented by the school and therefore policies have not been reviewed in line with recommendations. Recent work has placed governors in a position where they can move forwards more effectively.

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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?	4	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	4	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	No

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	4

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

30 November 2006

Dear Pupils

Spring Common School, American Lane, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29 1TQ

We would like to thank you for looking after us so well when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you and would especially like to thank members of the school council for their comments and to the life skills group for cooking one of us a meal.

What we found that is good about your school

- You usually have good relationships with one another and with the adults in the school.
- When you are involved in decision making, you take your responsibility seriously.
- Staff help you learn to support each other.
- Many of you try hard and older students make good progress in food technology.
- You are good at attending school and many of you enjoy working with pupils from other schools.
- You take part in a good range of sport and leisure activities

There are some important ways in which your school could help you to do better. We have asked the headteacher and governors to help improve things.

What we have asked your school to do now

- Make sure all staff know how best to help you behave well, especially for those pupils who find this difficult.
- Help teachers to know what you have learnt and how quickly, so that they can help you learn as much as possible and give you interesting work.
- We would like you to help the school find out which things are good and which need to be improved.
- Check that systems in school are used in the same way by all staff so that you can rely on having the support you need.

Inspectors will be visiting your school again to see how much progress it is making.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson on behalf of the inspection team Her Majesty's Inspector of School's