



Knightsfield School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117666
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290888
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector George Derby

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Knightsfield
School category	Community		Welwyn Garden City
Age range of pupils	11–18		Hertfordshire AL8 7LW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01707 376874
Number on roll (school)	54	Fax number	01707 321738
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Rev Brenda Tipping
		Headteacher	Mrs Lucy Leith
Date of previous school inspection	26 June 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	17–18 January 2007	290888

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Knightsfield is a day and residential school which admits boys and girls who are deaf; most pupils have severe or profound hearing losses. It is a specialist regional resource and pupils come from Hertfordshire, neighbouring local authorities and London boroughs. Over the years, it has gained a number of prestigious awards.

A high proportion of pupils have additional needs and some have learning difficulties. Because of pupils' disabilities, they generally enter the school with attainment which is below average. Just over a third of pupils are from black and minority ethnic groups and over a sixth speak English as an additional language. The residential part of the school has eight pupils; it is registered by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) for up to 16 places.

A large number of pupils have some lessons at Monk's Walk secondary school, a large specialist science college on the same campus as Knightsfield. This is a long-standing arrangement and a 'legal partnership agreement' is in force to ensure that provision is made for Knightsfield pupils.

Just one student is on the roll of the school's sixth form. In some years there have been no students. Knightsfield supports the students' hearing and pastoral needs, while the establishments in the local sixth form consortium support academic needs. Sixth form provision outside Knightsfield was not inspected. Most pupils leave at the end of Year 11 to attend local or specialist colleges.

The school's approach to supporting pupils' communication is to enable them to make best use of the hearing they have.

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 which cares passionately for its pupils. It provides exceptional value for money. Pupils do extremely well academically and make considerable strides in their personal development. As one parent wrote, 'since being at Knightsfield our son has continually impressed us, the school brings out the full potential of children'.

Pupils enjoy learning and life at Knightsfield immensely because the curriculum and lessons are tailored to meet their needs superbly, either on the Knightsfield site or at Monk's Walk. Parents are very positive about this; one wrote, 'I am pleased that my child has had the benefit of both situations.... [and has] the specialist back-up of qualified teachers of the deaf who reside on the doorstep'. The school's success is also because of the sheer determination of the headteacher in the pursuit of excellence. Her leadership and management and that of the senior team are outstanding. Governors provide exceptional support and constantly challenge the school to do all it can to meet its goals.

The school has gone from strength to strength since its last inspection. For instance, its initiatives to support pupils' learning, through aiding their thinking skills, are very well developed. These have brought significant benefits to the way pupils tackle their work and solve problems. The school is extremely well-placed to progress in the future because it knows itself exceptionally well. While the school has planned some major developments, such as its application for specialist school status, much of what it is trying to improve upon is 'fine tuning'. It has strengthened further the ways it knows how well it is doing and constantly checks this to ensure that it can provide the best – and it does!

Other examples of its great success are shown in the doubling of pupil numbers since the last inspection and the development of its regional role in taking pupils from other local authorities. Its work with its partners is exceptional. However, as a result, there is considerable pressure on places at both schools, an issue being tackled vigorously.

Although standards overall remain below average, pupils' achievements are outstanding. Compared with the national scene they are ranked extremely highly. This picture has been sustained over a number of years. The school also works very hard to develop its pupils' personal development. They gain an impressive understanding about healthy living and keeping safe. Pupils grow into very mature young adults who are self-assured, excellently behaved and who are extremely well-prepared for life after school. They know their own strengths and weaknesses and pursue realistic career goals. One past pupil spoke effusively about how well he was prepared for college. Pupils make a generally good contribution to the community, although there are missed opportunities for them to formally influence school life at Knightsfield or Monk's Walk.

Pupils develop in this way through the outstanding teaching and excellent care, support and guidance they get while at school. Pupils' primary need to improve their communication is at the centre of all teaching and is why pupils' achievements are so successful. Pupils make remarkable improvements in their speaking, listening, reading

and writing and together with the work on thinking skills; all this unlocks their ability to learn. The quality of support by assistants is also excellent and helps to maximise their learning, especially during lessons in Monk's Walk. While pupils' achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) are outstanding, but there are missed opportunities when ICT could even further support teaching and pupils' learning in other subjects.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 1

A very recent CSCI report judged that the boarding provision met or exceeded all of the necessary standards, and that the overall quality of provision was excellent. No areas were identified for improvement.

Pupils' development is very well supported by the residential provision: pupils can relax, study and socialise together, or join in an evening of special activities each week at the 'Knight club'. Day pupils can also join in these activities, which may include the cinema, ice-skating or a meal out.

Pupils' personal progress is thoroughly assessed in a diary each week. This covers their awareness and skills in health and safety, what they have most enjoyed, and how well they are learning community, independence and living skills. Staff are very well aware of these aspects whenever they interact with pupils, set up activities, or 'let pupils do their own thing'. Pupils' progress, along with any overnight problems, is shared between care and teaching staff each day at a briefing meeting, helping to ensure smooth handovers and avoiding any problems developing further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the use of ICT to support teaching and pupils' learning in all subjects.
- Provide greater opportunities for pupils to contribute formally to school life.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

All pupils, whatever their needs or backgrounds, make impressive gains throughout their time in school and their progress and achievement are outstanding. The range of attainment within any of the small groups is very wide but data on pupils' improvement put Knightsfield in the top few per cent of schools in England. The pupils' most significant achievement is in their ability to use the hearing they have and to communicate with peers and adults. This has a really positive effect on their work in other areas. As a result, they make significant progress in their academic work with a few reaching the standards expected of hearing pupils.

In 2006, all Year 11 pupils gained at least one GCSE pass and nearly all gained five A* - G passes. One pupil gained nine good GCSE passes. There are significant strengths in the pupils' attainment in art, design and technology, and ICT. Although pupils do

not undertake an examination in physical education, they also gain a great number of awards and develop a very wide range of physical and team building skills.

In 2006 the school achieved its best results ever in English and mathematics in national tests at the end of Year 9. The gains made over Key Stage 3 were remarkable; pupils' progress overall was more than double that expected of hearing peers in the same key stage. Although no pupils gained the higher levels, an impressive 67% reached Level 5 in English and 56% achieved Level 5 in mathematics. The levels reached in science were more modest, although achievement was good. All pupils in Year 9 achieved Entry Level passes in ICT.

Pupils generally meet or exceed their challenging targets; where there is a shortfall, it is because the number of pupils in the group has changed after the target as been set.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' knowledge of, and approach to living a healthy lifestyle is impressive. Most pupils take great advantage of the nutritious food on offer and of the superb range of physical and sporting activities. Pupils say that there is no bullying, 'just some falling out sometimes'. They feel totally secure, and have great confidence to speak with staff about anything that might trouble them.

Pupils enjoy their lessons immensely and other activities wherever they are held. They attend well, and have an extremely positive attitude to their learning. They try very hard, even in the areas such as listening, where they have most difficulty.

Pupils develop extremely good cultural and spiritual awareness through assemblies, lessons and many different activities, as well as through the experiences of work within groups where there is very mixed ethnicity of pupils. Their social and moral awareness is exceptional. Their sensitivity and empathy for others are highly developed and their behaviour is exemplary.

There are many excellent opportunities for pupils to take a positive role in events and activities in their own school community, Monk's Walk and further afield. They are very keen to partake in these. As one pupil said, 'I loved it when we did the school performance'. However, there is no school council to give pupils an 'official voice' when they feel they need to speak out about any matter that concerns them.

The school's emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills, alongside literacy, numeracy and computing skills serves them extremely well in their post-school lives. Pupils mix freely with other pupils and adults, independently find their way around the town, look after themselves at home, and have very good experiences in work placements.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is excellent because of the high level of expertise of staff, most of whom are qualified and very experienced teachers of the deaf. The knowledge of their pupils is exemplary because assessment and the checking of their progress are so thorough. Teaching assistants make an extremely valuable contribution and, in particular, have a significant role in assuring the success of the sessions at Monk's Walk. All staff have very high expectations of their pupils and take every opportunity to ensure that pupils' communication skills are maximised. Vocabulary is consistently emphasised and pupils' ideas are reinforced in lots of different ways, although, just occasionally, there are missed opportunities to support teaching and learning through the use of ICT. The management of pupils is exemplary and lessons are generally planned and organised meticulously.

Pupils learn outstandingly well because they are taught to use all the hearing they have and to develop language and thinking skills in a highly planned and structured way. This helps them make sense of what they are learning and is why they achieve so highly.

Most teaching is paced just right and lessons generally get off to a flying start. The pace keeps the pupils working productively and maintains their interest but teachers also ensure that concepts are acquired thoroughly and accurately.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because it is so well tailored to meet pupils' particular and individual needs. All lessons are planned very well to help pupils' communication skills, as well as the skills of the subject itself. An extensive range of subjects and courses is offered. This is because the school has access to Monk's Walk and to the local sixth form consortium which means the school can be very responsive to pupils' choice and tailor courses to pupils' needs. The increased numbers at Knightsfield and the re-organisation of the curriculum at Monk's Walk has put pressure on the availability of some courses, but nevertheless the range is still extensive. There are extremely good courses in personal and social development.

The curriculum is extended exceptionally well. A host of visiting speakers helps make learning a tremendously rich experience as does the great variety of educational visits and evening activities that are available for day and boarding pupils. Several times each year, pupils' learning benefits greatly when the main curriculum is suspended for unusual themed activities, extended visits and drama or musical performances.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The provision for care, guidance and support is outstanding. The school's comprehensive procedures for safeguarding pupils surpass current government requirements in both their compliance with guidelines, and the way staff follow them.

Pupils' progress is extremely well assessed in relation to their communication skills, personal development and academic prowess. There is a wealth of information which is very well used to guide pupils' learning. Subject leaders now contribute to this through detailed analysis and reporting on progress. All pupils have good and highly relevant individual targets for the development of their language and personal skills. Pupils know their targets and are involved in setting them, and staff take account of these in lessons. However, some targets do not always make it clear what pupils need to do to achieve success.

All pupils are very well supported in their learning, largely because teachers and assistants know their pupils and their needs extremely well. High quality support is provided by many other agencies and schools, such as for additional communication or learning difficulties, or work-related needs. Despite vacancies occurring with regard to some specialist external staff, the school has worked hard to ensure that pupils have a reasonable amount of speech and language therapy and audiology support through the use of temporary staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's pursuit of excellence is clearly seen in the high quality of provision and the pupils' outcomes. Her high expectations rub off on all staff, who demand the same high quality from themselves and of the work of their pupils.

This is an outstandingly well led and managed school which keeps its eye on local need as well as on the national scene in deaf education; it takes a lead in the development of regional provision. Its planning for the future is very well thought out and the school works very hard with its external partners to ensure its continued success.

Governance is excellent and of particular note is the governors' excellent approach to evaluating their own performance and identifying where they need to improve.

Governors are extremely supportive of the school and are very effective in assuring its quality. They have been particularly forthright in aiding the school to maintain its regional role in the face of pressure to reduce its catchment area. A weaker area among so many strengths is that neither governing body has representation from the partner school, something which was very effective in the past.

The key roles of the senior staff are very well defined and the contribution they make to the efficient running of the school and its effectiveness is outstanding. The tireless work done in liaising, planning and monitoring pupils' opportunities at Monk's Walk means they benefit extremely well from their experiences but as both schools develop

and expand, pressure is clearly on course availability. The legal agreement about the arrangements for provision was written some time ago and does not now reflect the complexities of both current situations.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

19 January 2007

Dear Pupils

Knightsfield School, Knightsfield, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 7LW

Thank you for being so helpful on the inspection and meeting to talk about your life at school.

We agree with you that you have a wonderful school. It did well the last time I visited in 2001 and, since then, has gone from strength to strength. It is an outstanding school because the staff work so hard to provide you with the right high quality experiences and you achieve extremely highly, both in your personal skills and academically. In addition, the care you get when you are in residence is excellent.

There are so many strengths it is difficult to list them all. A few are:

- Your language and communication skills develop so well because the school does all it can to help you make the best use of the hearing you have.
- You all work extremely hard and try your best; you grow into very mature young adults extremely well prepared for college or courses in the sixth form.
- Mrs Leith works extremely hard to make sure your school is well known in the region and she works with the school's partners to ensure that new ideas are developed and you get the best quality education.
- Your governors do a great deal to make sure you achieve as well as you can and that they are in an excellent position to help the school.
- The links between the senior staff at Knightsfield and those in Monk's Walk are outstanding and both headteachers work hard to ensure you get the best when you are there.

There are no really big areas where the school needs to improve. Some less important issues are that staff need to make more use of ICT to support their teaching and your learning and you could have greater opportunities to contribute formally to school life at Knightsfield and Monk's Walk.

Good luck with the future.

George Derby

Lead inspector