

Southfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130362
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	301324
Inspection dates	24–25 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Simon Brown
Headteacher	Mr Michael Philp
Date of previous school inspection	7 April 2003
School address	Travellers Lane Hatfield Hertfordshire AL10 8TJ
Telephone number	01707258259
Fax number	01707258260

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Southfield is a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, although an increasing number have more complex and diverse needs. The school has significantly more pupils with autistic spectrum disorders than it did at the time of the last inspection and some more pupils with behavioural difficulties, speech and language difficulties and physical needs. As a result of their difficulties and disabilities, pupils join the school with attainment that is well below the national average. No pupils are at an early stage in learning English as an additional language but a significant proportion have language and communication difficulties. The school has gained the Artsmark Gold award and is an Eco School.

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 that has sustained and built on the many strengths identified at the last inspection. The school is held in very high esteem by parents. They say that Southfield is 'a wonderful example of how education should be' because the staff are 'brilliant and every member of staff has the same fantastic attitude'. They describe the headteacher as 'dedicated, loyal and amazing', someone who 'truly loves his role and brings involvement and fun into children's lives'. They say that they 'never want their children to leave'.

Pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities mean that standards are necessarily well below those found in all schools nationally, but their achievement is outstanding, including within the Foundation Stage. This is because all the staff work as a strong team, instilling in pupils an enthusiasm for learning and encouraging them to do their best. This contributes to pupils' responsiveness and enjoyment. The curriculum is matched exceptionally well to pupils' interests and needs, including for those pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. The school provides particularly good opportunities for pupils to learn and develop through involvement in the arts.

Pupils are cared for exceptionally well and make outstanding progress in their personal development. Every child is treated as an individual: this is at the heart of everything the school does. Pupils flourish because they feel very safe and valued. They enjoy excellent relationships with the staff and one another. They love school and parents say that their children 'cannot wait to get to school every morning' and 'complain in the holidays that they cannot go to school'.

The school's success is the result of outstanding and inspirational leadership and highly effective management. The headteacher, senior managers and governors are self-critical and outward looking. Managers have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and of those areas that could be improved further. There is a continual drive for improvement and a commitment to excellence. This makes for an outstanding capacity to develop further, although managers do not always document their decisions about what is working well and the next actions they intend to take as fully as they should. The purpose-built accommodation and rich resources meet pupils' needs very well, and the school provides exceptionally good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Fine-tune the way managers evaluate the school's effectiveness and record the actions they intend to take, particularly by documenting important points emerging from the weekly meetings of senior managers.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding and parents say that their children have made 'leaps and bounds' in their progress and achieved 'beyond' their 'wildest dreams'. Pupils make exceptional progress in developing basic skills in literacy, numeracy and personal, social and health education, with no significant difference between the achievement of different groups of pupils. They make good progress, and in some cases outstanding progress, in developing their communication skills. Achievement is particularly good in and through the arts, where involvement in exciting projects enables pupils to gain a wide range of skills. In preparing and performing plays, pupils have painted sets, made puppets, learned songs and increased the fluency and expression of

their reading. Highly attractive artwork, undertaken as part of the 'Take One Picture' initiative, has led to pupils' work being exhibited in the National Gallery. Standards are equally high in music: all pupils in Years 5 and 6 play an instrument and the school performs every few years at the Royal Albert Hall. Pupils also take part alongside mainstream schools in local concerts and sporting events.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They feel happy and secure because they are entirely confident that the adults in school value them and appreciate their efforts and ideas. They enjoy school enormously and this is reflected in their outstanding behaviour and their high attendance rates. They concentrate very well and participate fully and enthusiastically in the varied and stimulating activities available to them. Pupils understand the importance of exercise and take advantage of the extensive sports programme. Pupils' willingness, including those with autistic spectrum disorders, to select from the healthy food options at lunch time is impressive.

Pupils are remarkably generous in identifying each other's strengths. Parents appreciate that their children forge friendships here, often for the first time, and this is especially significant for those with autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils become increasingly mature, responsible and highly principled. They make outstanding progress in their ability to understand serious issues, take responsibility for themselves and contribute to the school community. They develop a strong sense of right and wrong, especially regarding caring for the environment. They make extremely good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers have high expectations and are equally skilled in motivating pupils and in managing their behaviour. They ask probing questions that push pupils to think deeply and encourage them to communicate their ideas as fully as possible. They make exceptionally good use of resources, consistently using practical equipment and visual aids to assist pupils in grasping new ideas. Pupils find learning fun because they are so often actively involved, for instance directly exploring and observing dead fish in a science lesson and dressing up as Romans as part of their research in history. Teachers make good use of the interactive whiteboards and increasingly support pupils' communication through the use of pictures, symbols and technological aids. Thorough systems are in place for identifying pupils' individual learning needs so that work builds progressively on what they already know, and the school sets challenging targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Exceptional links between subjects and extremely well chosen activities and resources contribute to an outstanding curriculum. Key personal, social and academic skills are taught through all subjects and activities. Sensitive, individual arrangements ensure that pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and others with additional difficulties access the curriculum very effectively.

Creative activities, especially art, drama and story telling, are highly successful in stimulating pupils' imaginations. This supports their learning and personal development extremely well and adds a great deal to their enjoyment. There is an exceptionally comprehensive programme of trips out of school, visitors into school and special events. These events often include working alongside pupils in mainstream schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding care, support and guidance lie at the heart of all that the school does, and the school works conscientiously to maintain links with other professionals in the care and support of pupils. While there are robust systems in place to ensure they are kept safe, the really exceptional contribution the school makes to safeguarding pupils lies in the extent to which it gives them a voice, enhances their self-esteem and enables them to take responsibility for themselves.

There is excellent practice in the use of assessment information to measure and track pupils' academic performance. Teachers know pupils remarkably well and provide continual feedback to them about how they are doing. This is a crucial feature in empowering pupils and even some of the younger pupils show a clear awareness of the progress they are making, whether judging when work deserves a sticker or when they need to withdraw from a situation to regain composure.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding, based around a central principle of valuing every pupil as an individual. The headteacher, senior managers and governors have a very clear vision for the school and the school's excellent report at the time of the last inspection did not give rise to any hint of complacency. Instead, managers have looked for ways to build on the strengths identified at that time. They have done this in particular by ensuring the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils equally well, including the increasing number with more pronounced needs, and by introducing an in-depth system for analysing data. Parents feel that the school really listens to their views and stakeholders are involved actively in school improvement. Staff have exceptionally good opportunities to extend their skills through training, and the school has successfully supported three graduates in becoming qualified teachers. Strong links with other educational establishments, and in particular with arts organisations, do much to enrich the opportunities provided for pupils.

All staff with management responsibilities contribute actively to school improvement. Teaching is monitored rigorously and perceptive feedback informs teachers of how they could improve their work. Highly detailed analysis of pupils' progress informs the school's self-evaluation and underpins the tracking of pupils' progress. Managers liaise closely with one another to ensure pupils receive a seamless experience as they move from one class to the next. Managers continually discuss what is working well and what could be improved and the school improvement plan is a comprehensive document. Weekly management meetings are key to the school's continual drive for excellence in all areas, although decisions made at these meetings are not formally recorded.

The governing body makes an extremely good contribution to the school's effectiveness and has increased its efficiency since the last inspection by reorganising its work through two highly focused committees. Governors bring a range of valuable expertise and collect information for themselves, ask probing questions and are closely involved in school development.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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 quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	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	1
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
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.

Annex A

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

26 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Southfield School, Hatfield, AL10 8TJ

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We thoroughly enjoyed seeing all the exciting things you do, and now I am writing to let you know what we found out about your school.

This is an outstanding school. You told us that you love school and really enjoy learning; many of your parents wrote telling us just how wonderful the school is. You are making exceptionally good progress with your work, especially in reading, writing, mathematics, personal, social and health education and in art and music. The reason you do so well is because the teachers and teaching assistants provide you with interesting things to do that make you want to learn and we could see that you try really hard. The school matches work very well to what you need to learn and it provides particularly good opportunities for you to take part in exciting projects in art, drama, music and story-telling. We really liked all the pictures you made as part of the National Gallery project 'Take One Picture' and we had never seen anything quite like them in any other schools.

All the staff look after you extremely well and the school cares about every one of you. From the minute you arrive in the morning, when Mr Philp welcomes you at the front door, you know that you matter. We could see that you feel like this because you look so happy and enthusiastic, and some of your parents said that you complain in the holidays because you cannot go to school!

The school is so successful because the headteacher is outstanding in the way that he leads the school and all the other staff give him very good support. They are always thinking about how they could make the school even better for you and we want to help them to do that. They are already working on most of the things that could be improved. We have asked them to make sure that they write down important things they talk about because that would help everybody to be really clear about what to do next.

We wish you well in the rest of your time at Southfield.

Yours sincerely

M J Goodchild

Lead Inspector