

Kingsdown School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115442
Local Authority	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LA
Inspection number	311934
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2008
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 category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Moss
Headteacher	Miss Margaret Rimmer
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2005
School address	Snakes Lane Southend-on-sea Essex SS2 6XT
Telephone number	01702527486
Fax number	01702526762

Age group	2–17
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2008
Inspection number	311934

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Kingsdown School changed its designation at the beginning of September 2007. This was after protracted discussions and appeals against the decision to do this. It has been through a period of rapid transition and is effectively a 'new' school. It now caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties and has a small number of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The majority now display extremely low levels of attainment. Some pupils also exhibit challenging behaviour and a small number have complex needs, displaying a combination of difficulties. Fifty per cent of the current school roll was admitted in September with these needs. The first phase of a new building was completed at the end of August and another phase is due to start at the end of this year. A new headteacher started at the school in September 2006.

Although the school is now for pupils aged 3 to 14, it has retained its Key Stage 4 pupils for the moment. All of these have physical disabilities. They will stay until the end of the school year in 2009 so that they can complete their courses. Most pupils are White British, although there are a few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The school also provides outreach to local schools, supporting pupils on mainstream school rolls. It also manages a sensory support service for schools in Southend-on-Sea and the specialist staff for hearing and visual impairment are based at the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school, which is how it sees itself. It has clearly gained the confidence of parents after a period of enormous change. The purposeful drive and sharp vision of the headteacher, her use of specialists to assist the development of the school and the focus on teamwork have raised the morale of staff and moved the school forward in a very short time. There is undoubtedly a strong desire by all to make this school the best it can be and a strength in the way that staff are 'up' for developing their own skills, often in areas where they have had little experience. One success is the way the considerable number of pupils admitted have settled quickly and adapted well to the routines and expectations of their new school.

The changes to the school have not had any negative effect on the pupils remaining until they complete their Key Stage 4 courses. In fact, the organisation of the school with its two distinct populations runs well on a day-to-day basis. Pupils enjoy school immensely and most are enthusiastic learners and behave well. They are keen to come to school and their attendance is good. Because there is a strong focus on healthy eating and living, pupils know how to keep well, and older ones are well tuned into managing their disabilities. Another major change has been in adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of the new population and a good start has been made. Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory. The preparing of well-designed plans by a member of the senior leadership team who is a severe learning difficulties specialist has got the school off on the right footing and is guiding teachers and enabling them to build on this planning.

Parents' views are generally very positive and the statement made by one, 'I am really happy with this school', represents many of their responses. Another mentions the considerable dedication of teachers, which is undoubtedly true. Parents are positive about the progress their children make. This progress is satisfactory overall because the teaching is satisfactory. It is good, though, for the older, physically disabled pupils in Key Stage 4, some of whom have been in the school for many years. A small number of parents feel that a few of the staff do not have the skills to meet all pupils' needs and this is something the school is working hard to improve. However, there is still some way to go to ensure that staff explicitly plan for all the pupils in their classes and manage effectively the wide range of needs. Care is satisfactory. Support staff provide good personal care and assistance for pupils with medical needs. Those that help pupils in Key Stage 4 and pupils with lesser needs across the school, generally do this well. At times, however, a few are not sufficiently focused on the learning of pupils who have complex needs.

The school collects a lot of data on its pupils and has done so for many years. Staff are now beginning to work with other schools to agree on the levels they assess the pupils at. The school uses data well to track the progress of individual pupils. However, it recognises its weakness in that the information is not used to analyse trends and patterns in the progress of different groups and has suitable plans in place to do this.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior leadership team is relatively new and the headteacher, with the local authority, has worked well to build its capacity. Overall, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory. There is a clear delegation of responsibilities and it is a team which know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and what it needs to do to improve things further. The new approach to having teams of staff responsible for areas of learning instead of subjects is under-developed. They have been given the task of strategically planning their areas but there is a lack of clarity about their roles and responsibilities and an

absence of a clear timeframe in which to work. Governance is satisfactory. Governors provide good support for the school and are knowledgeable about its work. They rigorously monitor finance and have been keenly involved in building issues. However, they have less oversight of the curriculum and are not sufficiently involved in monitoring pupils' progress.

The outreach and sensory provision is well received by schools. The feedback is positive and schools wish they could have more. While a good system is in place to measure the effectiveness of the support for visual impairment against agreed standards, there is no such system for the other parts of these services.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Staff develop relationships very quickly with children and these, as well as their good communication with parents, help children to settle well and to be happy in their new environment. Children make satisfactory progress overall because teaching is satisfactory. Staff are very successful at getting children to engage in activities through the personal attention they give. A strong focus is rightly on communication skills, although occasionally there are missed opportunities to support these through sign, symbols and objects. Personal and social development is a strength. Choice, decision making and independent learning pervade the life of the class and lead to children making good progress personally and socially. Children's key achievements are soundly recorded on a regular basis, although they are not always related to a national expectation or criteria. Planning, leadership and management are satisfactory and the arrangements for the new accommodation and outside area are being planned. However, there is no action plan as such to identify other key developments over time.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that lessons meet the needs of all pupils, particularly those with complex difficulties, that support staff are sufficiently focused on the learning of pupils and that lesson plans clearly identify what all pupils are expected to achieve.
- Increase the effectiveness of the curriculum learning teams by clarifying their roles and responsibilities and by setting clear timelines in which to work.
- Ensure that rigorous analysis of the school's data on the progress of individuals and groups of pupils is undertaken, and that senior staff and governors use this to keep a close eye of the progress that the different groups make and to improve provision.
- Produce agreed standards against which the performance of the outreach provision and all aspects of the sensory service can be evaluated. A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils in Key Stage 4 make good progress and some exceptionally so. Work is tailored well to their academic needs. Some are on track to attain the higher grades at GCSE and some to attain the higher levels at Entry Level. Nevertheless, all these pupils do well from their starting points and many exceed their targets.

The main body of pupils in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 make satisfactory progress. Support for communication is good and many pupils make good progress in their ability to talk or use

communication aids. Many of the pupils are new to the school and the good guidance provided by specialists has helped staff plan activities which enable the pupils to make satisfactory progress. However, because some lack knowledge and experience, when they are not supported in lessons by specialists, they sometimes struggle to meet the needs of pupils with complex difficulties. In a few lessons, therefore, some of these pupils make less progress than the rest.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils always give their best and contribute as fully as possible to the activities they undertake. They take, and show, great pride in what they achieve and are keen to succeed and attempt the challenges set. Pupils are very supportive of each other, sharing and celebrating each other's achievements. They make a good contribution to the school, local and world community.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and pupils report they have experienced a range of spiritual and religious activities and take part in many moral discussions. One pupil stated, 'Its brill because we can have our say and discuss things properly.' Pupils grow in self-awareness, reflecting upon their feelings and actions.

The school has the Healthy Schools Award and this permeates the school, with pupils having fruit at break times and making healthy choices at lunchtime. Pupils display a good understanding of personal safety.

Through developing important literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology and life skills within all lessons, and the strong focus on preparing pupils for the future in Key Stage 4, pupils build a sound foundation for later life and their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is generally lively and engages pupils well. Most activities stimulate and motivate them. There were many examples of good teaching seen during the inspection, but occasionally there was some inadequate teaching. The big push on improving staff's understanding of the early developmental needs of pupils, and the criteria used for making assessments on them, is beginning to have a positive effect but some still find it difficult to plan and manage the very wide range of needs in their class. There were many examples of highly specific and detailed planning which are exemplars of good practice. In addition, targets set for individuals have become much more precise and relevant. Most teachers plan activities with the different needs of their class in mind, although not all make it explicit what each individual pupil will learn by the end of the lesson or series of lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

A major success in the school getting off to a flying start has been in the design of the new curriculum, although this is not fully developed. Through effective monitoring, the curriculum manager is able to provide well focused support for those who find planning for the diverse range of needs, difficult.

The well-established Key Stage 4 programme is good and provides pupils with a good balance of academic, vocational, and work related studies.

A good range of extra-curricular activities, which include karaoke, board games, and a wheel chair dancing club, are thoroughly enjoyed by the pupils. Sporting opportunities are good, with the pupils participating in swimming, football and a variety of other sports, provided by external coaches and the school's physical education teacher. Information and communication technology is used well in lessons to enhance pupils' learning and communication.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school protects its pupils well and all the necessary safeguarding procedures are in place. The wide range of multi-agency support fully enhances the health, safety and welfare of pupils. The school benefits from good links with external agencies, some of whose staff work regularly in the school. While the personal care, and especially the medical support, for those pupils with the most complex needs is good, their educational support is not as firmly embedded. The school does not make the most of all the data it collects on its pupils, especially to determine the progress of particular groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher's effective monitoring of the school's work has resulted in regular adjustments being made to improve the school. Target-setting processes are now better understood and targets provide a reasonable degree of challenge. Good support and coaching are provided to shore up weaker elements of provision and the senior team accurately recognises what it needs to do further. Good strategies are in place to improve the provision of pupils with the most complex needs. The senior leadership team provides satisfactory support. The middle leaders have responsibility for areas for learning but their roles are not clearly defined. Governors are knowledgeable but not are sufficiently rigorous in monitoring and evaluating pupil progress.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3

The quality of provision

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

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

27 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Kingsdown School, Southend-on-Sea SS2 6XT

Thank you for meeting with inspectors and telling us about your school and how immensely you enjoy it. You are clearly proud of it and show great enthusiasm for learning. You behave well and attendance is good. You feel very well supported by the staff, and this is especially the case with regard to the care and medical help you get. The recent changes have been enormous but you have coped with them remarkably well.

Your school is satisfactory and reflects the fact, that in most respects, it is a new school and is 'starting again' in its development. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress and are provided with sound teaching. Your headteacher has worked very hard to get the school in the position it is in after such a short time, although there is still a lot to do. Those of you in Key Stage 4 are carrying on much as you did previously. What you are provided with is good and you are taught well. You make good progress. The rest of the school has pupils with very different needs to yours. Staff are working hard to adapt programmes and change their teaching methods for these pupils but some still need more help.

These are the things we have asked the headteacher and staff to do to help the school to improve further:

- to plan for, teach and support better all the different pupils in each class, especially those with complex needs
- to ensure that the staff responsible for the areas of learning have a clear view of what they are expected to do
- that staff and governors are aware of the achievement of the different groups of pupils and to use this information to make the progress of all as good as the best.

Good luck for the future. I hope the oldest pupils continue to enjoy their last few years at Kingsdown.

George Derby

Lead inspector