

Spring Common School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110946
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	322290
Inspection dates	24–25 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Morris-King HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	141
6th form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Christine Gilder
Headteacher	Mrs Kim Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2006
School address	American Lane Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE29 1TQ
Telephone number	01480 377403
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

When Spring Common School was inspected in November 2006 it was judged to be providing an inadequate standard of education and therefore to require special measures. Her Majesty's Inspectors subsequently visited the school on three occasions prior to this inspection to monitor its progress.

Spring Common caters for pupils with learning difficulties, all of whom have a statement of special educational need. The majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties and of these many have Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Other pupils have profound multiple learning difficulties, and there is a smaller number of older pupils who have moderate learning difficulties. Some of the pupils also have complex medical conditions. The school serves a wide, mainly rural area centred on the market town of Huntingdon. Nearly 20% of pupils are in receipt of free school meals. Nine pupils do not have English as their first language. Four pupils are Looked After by the local authority or live in supported accommodation. In addition, around 15% of pupils receive respite or hospice care on a part-time basis. The nature of pupils' learning difficulties mean that they are working well below age-related expectations.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

The overall effectiveness of Spring Common is satisfactory, with a growing number of elements that are good. The headteacher provides the school with good, clear leadership. She has worked tirelessly to provide the school with much-needed direction and focus which has resulted in significant and continuing improvement. She is well supported by a dedicated team of middle and senior leaders, who have grown in confidence and competence and make good use of their specialist skills and knowledge. Because of this good leadership, staff know what is expected of them, they are well supported, and they have risen with enthusiasm to the challenge of improving the school day by day. Good support and challenge from governors has been a key factor in the school's improvement. These factors indicate that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

The school is a calm, pleasant and inclusive environment in which pupils are well cared for and feel safe. Pupils' moral and social development is especially strong. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Pupils' personal development, including their behaviour, is good. Pupils who find it difficult to behave well receive consistent, well-focused support and consequently make good progress with this aspect of their learning. Those who need high levels of care receive appropriate adult attention. Autistic pupils who were previously isolated from their peers are well integrated into age-related classes and play a full part in the life of the school. Parents are happy with the school and believe that they are kept well informed.

Achievement has improved significantly and is now satisfactory overall. The school has set ambitious targets for pupils in literacy and numeracy, which an increasing number are meeting. The school's greatly improved assessment system enables teachers and senior leaders to notice quickly if pupils are not achieving as much as they could, and take appropriate steps to put this right. This is significantly reducing the previously widespread underachievement in these subjects. In other curriculum areas assessment is less well developed so the school is not always as clear about pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are not well enough used to help pupils to make progress.

Teaching is satisfactory overall. Lessons are well organised and teachers and support staff work well as a team. Staff are enthusiastic and activities are interesting. Extensive, well-focused training is increasingly effective in enabling staff to meet pupils' often highly complex needs. In lessons, there is generally an appropriate focus on pupils' individual needs but sometimes staff are not specific enough about what they want different groups or individuals to achieve. The school is aware that this is still a priority for training and development. A growing number of lessons are good and sometimes outstanding. In these lessons, thoughtful planning based on previous assessment, a range of resources and carefully targeted challenge and support ensures that tasks and approaches are appropriate for each pupil, and as a result they make good progress. The curriculum is satisfactory and increasingly elements are good. The thorough and well led focus on literacy and numeracy has greatly improved these essential areas and the school is now ready to take a similar approach to other subjects. Improved communication systems have made a considerable contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum for those pupils who need additional support to communicate. Careful

development of sensory approaches to the curriculum have also improved provision for many learners.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Post-16 provision is satisfactory with some good aspects. The manager responsible for Post-16 provision has a clear vision, and is ably supported by senior leaders. Significant improvements have been made to the curriculum. As a result it is now broader, more work related and better enables students to progress successfully onto the next stage in their lives. Students make satisfactory and sometimes good gains in a range of entry-level qualifications and links with local colleges are better established. These provide increased opportunities for students to learn new skills within different learning environments and have already enabled a number of students to progress onto further education courses. Work experience for learners is successfully targeted to individual students' preferences. However, whilst the curriculum is much more focused on the needs of young adults, strategies used by staff with students are not always age appropriate. Students' enjoyment, self-esteem and social skills are enhanced through the meaningful and relevant activities organised to improve their independence, for example, learning to travel by themselves to college and cooking for a large group of people with all the literacy, numeracy and social skills these activities entail. However, individual learning targets related to personal development and independence are not always identified or used to plan lessons well enough. Advice and guidance are good and contribute successfully to the comprehensive transition arrangements now in place.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children achieve satisfactorily because of satisfactory teaching. Provision is better for children's personal and social education than for their communication, language and literacy development. Staff provide good opportunities to develop children's sense of responsibility and independence. However, although IEPs are starting to be used more successfully, children's personalised targets, particularly those for communication and language, are not clearly addressed in lessons. As a result of teaching assistants' growing levels of skill, they provide good support and work together as a strong team. Children are receiving an improving level of specialised support for their often high level of need. For example, the school has trained the staff to provide good individual physiotherapy and sensory experiences for those with profound multiple learning difficulties. Relationships are sensitive and unfailingly caring. Not enough use is made of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to enhance learning and engage children's interest but when ICT is used it is effective. When a digital camera was used spontaneously to photograph a child successfully holding his own cup, it worked very well and children later remembered with pleasure his achievement.

The curriculum is not creative enough, nor resources always appropriate, to fully interest children with enjoyable hands-on activities. The outside space area is underused for learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that in each lesson the subject-based learning outcome for each pupil is firmly based on assessment information and is tightly focused on the next step.
- Refine the personal development targets in pupils' IEPs so that the desired skills can be taught and practised in lessons and progress can be assessed and tracked.

- Improve the quality of pupils' learning in the Foundation Stage by developing a more creative approach to the curriculum, making better use of the outdoor areas and of ICT, and focusing the development of communication and language more closely on children's individual needs.

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

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall because teaching has improved and is more closely focused on meeting their needs. In literacy and numeracy, where many improvements have been made to teaching and the curriculum, the school has accurate information about the progress pupils are making. This shows that a growing number of pupils are making good progress which is enabling them to learn quickly some much-needed skills. A small number of pupils have not made adequate progress over the last year but this number is decreasing each week because the school is planning and implementing additional support or different approaches to meet their needs more effectively. As teaching and the curriculum improve, pupils are beginning to make better progress in other curriculum areas. The school has less information about the progress pupils make in other areas of their learning but inspection evidence indicates that this is generally satisfactory. At Key Stage 4, pupils are making steady progress towards a range of accreditation, and a number of Year 11 and post-16 pupils have already been successful. The pupils with autism who were in the now disbanded class are making steady and sometimes good progress with their communication and social skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are increasingly leaving Spring Common as confident, young people. The older students' levels of maturity and confidence were typified during a 'restaurant day' when a group prepared and served a Greek meal to friends and visitors. The way they handled this event was exemplary. They behave well because they are skilfully encouraged to consider the consequences of their actions, for example what might happen if they lose their temper. Pupils are offered choices which help them to make their own decisions and develop self control and independence. Pupils, including post-16 students, are increasingly making a difference to the school community. For example, by expressing their opinions through the reinvigorated class councils and school council they have been involved in planning a new range of lunchtime activities. There is an exciting range of sports on offer, such as running and cycling clubs, and an increasing number of pupils are taking part which helps them to stay active and healthy. Pupils are not always keen to accept new, healthier food options and do not always eat as well as they could at snack times. Because pupils are now making better progress with their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills they are becoming better prepared for the future. Attendance is good because pupils enjoy school and parents value all the school is providing.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Lessons are typified by good supportive relationships and an environment which fosters care and learning. Teaching assistants generally make a positive contribution to the learning by providing highly tailored support for individuals. The school has rightly focused their attention on improving the teaching of literacy and numeracy. As a result staff are generally confident when teaching these subjects and pupils' learning is at least satisfactory as a result. This improvement has been supported by a good selection of well-organised resources, such as book boxes and multi-sensory equipment, which support learning well. The use of ICT in lessons is satisfactory and improving. Where it is used well it stimulates pupils' interest. For example, in a good music lesson pupils responded very well to an exciting introduction involving multi-media. The school has developed a more comprehensive range of means of communication, such as the use of symbols and signs, which is improving pupils' learning and their well-being.

Targets in pupils' IEPs are not sufficiently measurable and are not used well enough. As a result, opportunities to work on pupils' important personal development targets during lessons, such as to use Makaton, are sometimes missed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The sensory curriculum, provision for developing pupils' communication skills and the curriculum for pupils with autism have improved significantly. The literacy and numeracy curricula have been thoroughly revised and are now suitable for the school. These developments are now having a positive effect on pupils' progress, for example more pupils are learning to read, and the standard of signing has improved, leading to better communication. Curriculum provision has been improved by grouping pupils by age. This is allowing the school to plan for progression through the curriculum and to avoid undue repetition of topics. Following the strong focus on these aspects of the curriculum, the school has begun to move into the next phase of development, with a focus on other important subjects such as science, personal, social and health education (PSHE), ICT and creative subjects. The school has broadened its links with mainstream schools and increased the number of pupils who attend mainstream provision for some of their lessons.

Activity days, such as the recent 'maths day' are starting to enrich the curriculum and the range of extra-curricular activities is growing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has a good understanding of the personal needs of all pupils. A substantial amount of skilled individual help is timetabled which gives many pupils effective support with communication skills and behaviour. New safeguarding policies and practices are good and as a result staff have a high level of awareness of how to keep pupils safe. Approaches to

working with autistic pupils are clear to all staff because the provision is well co-ordinated and well led, so staff are confident and consistent in supporting all autistic pupils including those whose behaviour may be challenging. Recent developments in assessing and tracking progress have sharpened the focus on the next steps in pupils' learning, which supports them better in making progress. This is reflected in the recent detailed, high quality reports for parents on their children's progress, which include annotated photographs. In addition, greatly improved techniques for communication have improved all pupils' engagement in learning and this has had a very positive impact on learning and personal development. These improved communication skills have strengthened pupils' relationships with staff and each other and, increasingly, led to pupils doing more for themselves. Clear pathways to further education and employment are in place for Key Stage 4 pupils and post-16 students through a good choice of accredited courses and work related learning, the catering elements of which are outstanding.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher has been pivotal in enabling senior leaders and middle leaders to take on increasing amounts of responsibility and lead the school well. These leaders are now self-directed, motivated and base their actions on secure monitoring and evaluation. Leaders have driven forward an ambitious programme of improvement to good effect. As a result, major weaknesses in the school have been remedied and senior leaders and middle leaders, together with all the staff, are well focused on continual improvement. A good staffing structure has enabled teachers and support staff to develop specialisms, which has improved provision for pupils and improved staff's enjoyment of their work.

Parents and the school have had longstanding concerns about the level of health services which the school receives. An extensive audit of the physiotherapy and occupational therapy support carried out by health professionals confirmed the headteacher's view that the school's needs were not being adequately met. Subsequently, the Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust has secured funding for a greatly improved level of service and actions have been taken to begin to enhance the school's physiotherapy and occupational therapy support.

Governance is good and has been a significant influence on the school's improvement. The governing body is well organised and well led. Because governors ensure that they are well informed and discuss important issues with each other they are able to provide good challenge and support to the school.

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	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?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

25 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Spring Common School, American Lane, Huntingdon, PE29 1TQ

Thank you for helping me and my colleagues each time I have visited your school. I have enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn. Your school has got better each time and now there are quite a few things about your school that are good. Here are some of the things that I found out:

- Your headteacher and the other people who are in charge of the school are doing a good job. They have helped the staff to get even better at teaching you and helping you.
- You are learning much more now than when I first came to Spring Common because your lessons are better.
- You enjoy coming to school and doing activities such as reading, cooking, art, PE and clubs.
- It is good that you are now in classes with other pupils who are the same age as you.
- You are well behaved. You get on well with each other and with the staff.
- Everyone uses signing a lot more which really helps some pupils.
- Older pupils are getting on well at college and work experience, and getting certificates.

I have asked your school to do a few things to help you learn even better:

- Think really carefully about what each of you needs to learn in each lesson.
- Improve your IEP targets and help you to practise the most important parts of your IEP in each lesson (for example if you are learning to use Makaton then make sure you get lots of practise).
- Think of lots of exciting ways to help the youngest children to learn, including playing outdoors and using ICT.

Thank you again for your help, and well done!

Yours sincerely

Mrs S. Morris-King

Her Majesty's Inspector