

Grange School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109735
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	325015
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2008
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	Foundation
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	139
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janet Bodily
Headteacher	Mrs Ellen Zapiec
Date of previous school inspection	14 November 2005
School address	Halsey Road Kempston Bedford MK42 8AU
Telephone number	01234 407100
Fax number	01234 407110

Age group	5–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a Foundation School with specialist status for special educational needs (cognition and learning). It caters for students with moderate learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders, and has a unit for 23 students with autism. The school's intake has become more complex since the last inspection. In particular, there are now more students with challenging behaviour and/or severe autism. Currently, there are no students at Key Stage 1 and there are far more students in the secondary department than in the primary. Boys outnumber girls by two to one. Most of the students are White British; a minority are of Asian British heritage; just a few are of Black British or Gypsy/Roma origin or travellers of Irish heritage. A number of students are cared for by the local authority. The school provides outreach services to other schools in the area and runs Family Learning courses. It has National Support School status and has spoke status for Enterprise Education. It leads and supports 10 other special schools in Bedfordshire and Luton to develop enterprise. The school has Healthy School status and was named Bedfordshire's Football Association Charter School of the Year in 2008. The headteacher is retiring at Christmas and a new headteacher has been appointed to take up post in January 2009.

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 its last inspection. It provides students with an exceptionally high quality of education. Teaching, the curriculum, and care, guidance and support are all outstanding. Parents hold the school in high esteem and a number wrote to express their satisfaction with its work. One parent said, 'We are thrilled with the Grange and how they care and educate our son: we could ask for no more from a school, it is a very special place and we feel privileged to be a part of it.'

Students' learning difficulties mean that standards are well below the national average. Their achievement is, nevertheless, outstanding and students leave with an impressive number of qualifications. The school has done exceptionally well to sustain its level of success in examinations given the increased complexity of students' needs. This is because it has highly effective systems for identifying their learning difficulties. Its designation as a school with specialist status for cognition and learning has increased the amount of individual support students receive. In particular, the school makes outstanding provision for students who need intensive support to develop their literacy skills, for those who have autistic spectrum disorders and who are supported through its new personalised learning centre.

Achieving academic success through a curriculum matched exceptionally well to their needs has a very positive impact on students' confidence and self-esteem. Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students enjoy school a great deal. They learn how to stay healthy and the importance of keeping safe. They readily take responsibility and the school prepares them exceptionally well for the future. One parent noted how she has noticed her son has 'a glow in his face' since he started at Grange. Another said, 'My daughter has her future all mapped out due to the great support from the school'.

Exceptional leadership by the headteacher, senior leaders and governors means that the school is a dynamic place always ready to embrace new initiatives. Expectations are very high and there is an absolute commitment to enabling students to fulfil their potential. The school has excellent links with other schools. Teamwork is very strong and staff morale is high. The school's effectiveness in integrating students with more complex difficulties stems from very coherent support systems and outstanding training opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants to extend their skills. Self-evaluation is good. Leaders at all levels are very reflective and regularly meet to discuss the school's work. However, they do not systematically document the key points that emerge from reflection, discussion and monitoring. Some good documentation supports the school's accurate estimation of its own effectiveness but the self-evaluation form is overly detailed. As at the time of the last inspection, subject leadership is good. The role of subject leaders has developed further but these leaders have limited opportunities to observe teaching. Governance remains outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen self-evaluation by systematically recording key points that emerge from reflection, discussion and monitoring, and simplify the school's self-evaluation form
- Ensure that subject leaders have the opportunity to observe lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Throughout the school, students make at least good and frequently outstanding progress. Those who join the school at Key Stage 2 quickly begin to make good progress. Once they move into the secondary department, with teaching by subject specialists and opportunities to take a wide range of accredited courses, their progress is outstanding. The progress students make from the beginning of Key Stage 3 to the end of Key Stage 4 puts the school in the top five per cent nationally compared with all other schools. Most students reach the challenging targets that are set in their individual education plans and within subjects. In recent years, students have met with a very high level of success in accredited courses, which they take in Years 9, 10 and 11. In 2008, Year 11 students all left with nationally recognised qualifications. Just under a third gained five or more A* to G grades at GCSE. On average, students gained three GCSE passes each and the most able gained seven or eight passes. In addition, students gained an array of Entry Level Certificates in a wide range of subjects: 21 students gained a total of 199 certificates. Some also gained accreditation through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Bronze Award. All groups of students make similar progress, including boys and girls, those who are looked after by the local authority, those of minority ethnic heritage and who come from traveller backgrounds. Students do particularly well in art and design and meet with a high degree of success in sporting activities. Almost all students go on to further education and training.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students have exceptionally positive attitudes to school. Their enjoyment is evident in their good attendance and readiness to work hard, both independently and with others. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students are polite and considerate. All groups of students, including those with autistic spectrum disorders, develop excellent social skills and learn to cope with an increasing range of experiences. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is usually outstanding. Students have a very good understanding of right and wrong and a clear social conscience. They genuinely care about each other and staff. Students are very aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles, and eagerly participate in health promoting activities and vigorous exercise. They understand the importance of keeping safe and looking after themselves. Members of the school council take their role very seriously and they have been involved in the process of appointing a new headteacher. The school and wider community benefit from the students' readiness to take responsibility, for instance, organising sporting events for local primary schools. Through enterprise activities, students raise significant funds to support a number of charities whilst developing their own self-confidence and teamwork skills. As a result of their successful work experience placements, a number of students have been offered Saturday jobs.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is nearly always at least good and often outstanding. At Key Stage 2, good teaching ensures that students quickly settle and develop the necessary learning skills to succeed.

Effective teaching means that they build consistently on their existing skills and at Key Stages 3 and 4 benefit from a significant amount of outstanding teaching by staff who are specialists in their subjects. Teaching in art is inspirational, informed by excellent subject knowledge, and it is also of very high quality in the unit for autistic spectrum disorders and the personalised learning centre. Teachers have very high expectations for their students and provide exactly the right balance of support and challenge. Relationships between staff and students are excellent, and teachers very carefully provide increasing opportunities for students to make decisions for themselves as they move through the school. Teaching assistants make an outstanding contribution to students' progress and development, and teachers and their assistants work as seamless teams. Teachers make very good use of information and communication technology (ICT), including interactive whiteboards and video clips, to stimulate learning. In addition, they often use visual and practical resources to very good effect to help students grasp new concepts. Staff who work with students with autistic spectrum disorders make exceptionally good use of pictures and symbols to support communication. They have also made some innovative resources to help students overcome their difficulties. Strong emphasis on literacy and language development benefits all students and effectively supports those for whom English is an additional language. Assessment is extremely thorough. Teachers are very clear about students' learning needs and set challenging targets. They regularly involve students in assessing their own learning and usually provide clear feedback at the end of lessons about how well they have done. Homework is used very well to extend and consolidate learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is extensively adapted to meet students' individual needs. The promotion of the basic skills of literacy, numeracy, ICT and personal, social, health and citizenship education is outstanding. A wide range of additional activities enriches the curriculum. Lunchtime and after-school clubs are very well supported and much enjoyed by the students. Participating in activities such as orienteering, problem solving, sport for all abilities, and going on residential visits, develops students' independence and teamwork skills. The personal, social and health education programme is particularly effective in enabling students to understand health issues and keep themselves safe. Opportunities to gain accreditation at Key Stages 3 and 4 are outstanding, and this supports students' transition to the world of work or further education exceptionally well. The recognition and celebration of ethnic diversity throughout the curriculum ensure that students from all backgrounds are fully included.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

It is not surprising that parents are very appreciative about how well their children are cared for, guided and supported. Links between the school and a wide range of other agencies are outstanding. Procedures for ensuring students' health and safety and for safeguarding and protecting them are very thorough. Particularly vulnerable students are supported with skill and compassion. Behaviour is managed exceptionally well and regular attendance rigorously pursued. The new vertical house system has significantly strengthened the school's capacity to guide students as they move from the primary to the secondary department. Older students receive high quality support and guidance as they prepare to take the next steps in their life. Students' academic progress as well as their personal development and behaviour are targeted and tracked extremely well. Students learn in an atmosphere that is supportive, yet enabling

and empowering, with an emphasis on personal development and success. Students are clear about the importance of continuously improving their work, and when asked what happens when they have met their targets, one said, 'We get new ones, of course.' The Family Learning Centre develops parents' awareness about how to support their children's learning as well as offering courses for parents and families.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding vision and direction to the school's work. Senior leaders support her very well and this creates a strong, shared sense of purpose amongst the staff. There is a clear long-term vision for the school and development planning is very thorough. There is no complacency and school leaders are engaged in a continuous drive to improve the quality of education. Although subject leaders undertake little lesson observation, they are involved in other aspects of monitoring and plan developments in their subjects well. The system for managing the performance of teachers and teaching assistants is extremely thorough, linked closely to planned school development. Community cohesion is outstanding: the school is a harmonious and highly inclusive establishment that reaches out to parents, families, other schools and the community. Senior leaders are very outward looking, readily forming links with other schools to improve opportunities for their own students as well as offering outreach support. Their work in this area is reflected in the school's specialist status and its designation as a National Support School.

Governors are fully involved in the life and work of the school, and have very effective systems in place to challenge as well as support senior leaders. The school has made outstanding improvement since the last inspection. Given its good self-evaluation and the imminent retirement of the long-serving headteacher, it is well placed to improve further.

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Annex A

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

9 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Grange School, Bedford, MK42 8AU

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed our time with you. Now I am writing to let you know what we found out about your school.

You are lucky to go to an outstanding school that provides you with a really good education. Many of your parents wrote to tell us how pleased they are with the school and you told us just how much you enjoy it. We could see that for ourselves by how hard you work in lessons and the fantastic examination results students get when they leave school. Having opportunities to take GCSEs and get a lot of other qualifications gives you a really good chance of a successful future. You make outstanding progress because the teaching is so good, and the adults in school are very good at matching work to the individual needs of each student.

You nearly always behave very well, and you have extremely good relationships with each other and with your teachers and teaching assistants. You are finding out about how to be healthy and how to stay safe. We were pleased to see how enthusiastic many of you are about exercise and fitness. It is really good that you have opportunities to take responsibility, especially as you get older, and we were impressed to hear about the sports events you organised for younger children.

Your school is so good because your headteacher provides excellent leadership, and Teachers and governors support her really well. They are always thinking about ways to make the school even better for you. To help them with this, we have asked them to make some changes to the way they check what is working best in the school and what could be improved.

You can help them by continuing to do your very best and making the most of all the opportunities the school provides for you.

Yours sincerely

Ms M J Goodchild

Lead inspector