

Weatherfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109736
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	325016
Inspection date	18 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Declan McCarthy

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jacqui Hunt
Headteacher	Mr Carl Peters
Date of previous school inspection	11 July 2006
School address	Brewers Hill Road Dunstable Bedfordshire LU6 1AF
Telephone number	01582 605632
Fax number	01582 605633

Age group	7–16
Inspection date	18 May 2009
Inspection number	325016

© Crown copyright 2009

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 an additional inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the achievement of different groups of pupils
- the use of assessment by teachers in planning and matching learning tasks to particular needs
- the effectiveness of monitoring by leaders and governors.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and tracking data, discussion with pupils, the staff, and the chair of governors, and an analysis of school documentation and parent questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the schools own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Weatherfield School provides for pupils whose primary needs are designated as moderate learning difficulties. However since its last inspection, there has been a significant decrease in pupil numbers. The nature and complexity of pupils' needs has increased. There are pupils on roll now who have severe learning difficulties, sensory impairments, autistic spectrum disorder, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and speech language and communication difficulties. There are also pupils with a range of additional medical needs. Consequently, when pupils enter the school their attainment is very low given the nature and complexity of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. An above average proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. Most pupils are White British and a below average proportion are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few pupils are at early stage of learning English. The school has Healthy School status and the Green Flag award as 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: 2

Weatherfield School provides a good education and high quality care for its pupils. It rightly deserves its good reputation in the community and among parents. This is reflected in the many positive comments of parents, who are very supportive of its work. Comments, such as 'Weatherfield is a good school because staff are very caring and are helping my child to make good progress', reflect the views of many. As a result of good leadership the school has maintained high quality provision since its last inspection and is valued highly by its pupils and their parents. The headteacher has effectively continued to maintain the strong sense of community and family ethos in the school. He is also ably supported by senior staff who have overseen improvements since the last inspection, such as the introduction of a new assessment system and the extension of learning opportunities within the curriculum.

Pupils' achievement is good overall. By the time they leave school, pupils have made good progress during their accredited courses and leave school with a good range of qualifications. These include Entry Level Certificates in English, mathematics, science and design technology, GCSE, and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Bronze and Silver Awards. They also achieve a range of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications in courses, including animal care and horticulture. Nearly all pupils make good progress in lessons. Pupils with additional learning difficulties make good progress in lessons because they receive effective individual support and guidance and are provided with work which meets their needs. Pupils make satisfactory progress against the very challenging targets set for them. A few pupils only partially achieve their targets because they are not always realistic enough in relation to pupils' abilities and aptitudes. A new assessment system was introduced last term and it is too early for the school to analyse the progress of different groups with this system, as there is insufficient data recorded. However, inspection evidence shows that there are no differences in the achievements of pupils with more complex needs, those from minority ethnic backgrounds or those at an early stage of learning English.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. They are enthusiastic about learning and nearly all pupils greatly enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in pupils' good attendance overall. They have a keenly developed sense of right and wrong and, consequently, their behaviour is good and sometimes outstanding. Pupils increase their self-esteem and gain in confidence as they move through the school. Assemblies make a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development with good opportunities for reflection. The farm makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development. Numerous opportunities to experience awe and wonder occur, when for example they see the birth of new born lambs and through the promotion of healthy eating where pupils grow and harvest their own organic vegetables. Nearly all pupils make healthy choices and exercise well through the good opportunities for sport and through the residential experience of outdoor adventurous activities. Pupils make a good contribution to their school and local community. These are as playground pals, as school councillors, by showing consideration and respect for others, and by learning to care for their farm animals. Pupils are active participants in the ECO council which promotes conservation through involvement in such activities as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds 'Wildsquare' survey project. Pupils are increasingly aware of the rich diversity of other cultures within British society and globally. Consequently, those from different ethnic backgrounds interact in a positive and tolerant manner with very rare examples of racial discrimination. Pupils stay safe and the rare incidents of bullying are effectively dealt with by

staff. Through effective opportunities to participate in work experience, their good progress in basic skills and personal development, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

Strong teaching ensures that pupils make good progress in lessons. Lesson planning has improved since the last inspection. There are now clear learning objectives, the setting of different tasks and the use of a variety of teaching methods for pupils with a wide range of needs. However, occasionally opportunities to extend pupils' learning are not identified so a few higher attainers do not make as much progress as they could. Behaviour is always managed very effectively and all staff have very good relationships with their pupils. Consequently, pupils nearly always focus well on their learning, try hard and show respect for staff and each other. Teaching assistants effectively support the learning of pupils with more complex needs; teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is strong.

There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' basic skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology within the good curriculum. Older pupils benefit from a wide range of effective opportunities for accreditation, including an increasing range of vocational courses through good links with local schools and colleges. There are good opportunities to enrich learning through the excellent provision of the school farm and a range of visits and visitors, such as famous jazz musicians. There is a well thought out programme for work-related learning with improved opportunities for work experience within the local community. Staff provide very good care and pastoral support to pupils to enable them to participate in all opportunities available to them and to leave school as well-rounded and responsible individuals. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are fully in place. The work of external professionals, such as speech and language therapists and the medical professionals effectively promotes communication and personal development. Academic guidance is satisfactory. There are good systems to track pupils' progress and parents have good opportunities to participate in annual and transition plan reviews. All pupils benefit from individual education plans with clear, specific and measurable targets. Better use is made of assessment since the last inspection to ensure tasks are matched to learning needs, although on occasion, not enough use is made of this information to extend pupils' learning.

Good leadership and management has ensured strong links within the local community and good promotion of community cohesion nationally and globally. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection with subject leaders now carrying out 'light touch' lesson observations. However, these are not always focused sharply enough on the school's priorities for development, such as the achievement of different groups of pupils. Under the strong leadership of the chair of governors, the governing body is providing good support for the school. However, not all governors have formulated their own independent view of how well the school is doing through a system of focused visits to evaluate its work. As a result, governance is satisfactory overall and the school's own self-evaluation is, sometimes, too optimistic. Nevertheless, as a result of good leadership and good improvements overall since the last inspection, the school has a good capacity to further improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that assessment information is analysed more sharply and used more effectively to set realistic and challenging individual education plan targets and to extend the learning of all higher attaining pupils.

- Extend the monitoring role of governors and subject leaders so that they focus on more accurate self-evaluation of the school's work and of the quality of teaching on pupils' achievement.

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?	2
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
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	2

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

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

19 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Weatherfield School, Dunstable, LU6 IAF

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and seeing how hard you are working in lessons. Yours is a good school and your parents are rightly proud of the progress you are making. Here are more good things I found out about your school.

Your behaviour is good and sometimes it is excellent. You all get along well with each other and you like the staff. You all stay safe and healthy in school and you told me how much you really enjoy the excellent farm. Older pupils have good opportunities to take examinations and to do work experience. You are making good progress and nearly all of you are learning as much as possible in school because teaching is good. Mr Peters and his senior staff manage the school well and make sure you all stay safe. Here are two things your school can do to make it even better:

- staff can use the information they have about how well you are learning, to set you targets that you can achieve and to extend the learning of those of you who learn more quickly
- governors and subject leaders can check for themselves how well the school is doing and how well teaching helps you all to achieve in different subjects.

I know you will continue to do your best and I wish you luck in your examinations.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCarthy

Lead inspector