

# Furze Down School

## Inspection report

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Unique Reference Number	110585
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	325172
Inspection dates	12–13 February 2009
Reporting inspector	William Geoffrey Robson

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	117
Sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Caulfield
Headteacher	Sue Collins
Date of previous school inspection	7–8 February 2006
School address	Verney Road Winslow MK18 3BL
Telephone number	01296 713385
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Email address	scollins@bucksgfl.org.uk

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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector visited 10 lessons, and held meetings with the headteacher, governors, staff and pupils. He observed the school's work and looked at documentation including: files showing pupils' progress and the support provided by the school and outside agencies; school development plans; minutes of governors' meetings; and arrangements for safeguarding pupils and staff. He analysed 85 parental questionnaires.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at the following:

- the progress of pupils with differing needs throughout the school
- the effectiveness of assessment and tracking procedures to meet pupils' individual needs
- how effectively the school enables pupils to develop personally and socially
- the rigour of the school's procedures for self-evaluation
- how effectively the school provides for the children who enter during the Early Years Foundation Stage.

## Information about the school

The school provides for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All have difficulties that affect their ability to communicate or interact with others. However, most pupils experience more than one difficulty, so that their needs are complex. For many, their primary need relates to speech and language difficulties, autism or moderate learning difficulties. Additionally, many have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, often as a result of traumatic events in their lives. A few have further needs as a result of hearing or visual impairment. There are many more boys than girls. The very large majority are of White British origin. At the time of the inspection there were three looked after children. Seven pupils were at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. At the time of the last inspection, it was anticipated that the school would take only secondary-age pupils from 2007. This decision was reversed by the local authority and there are currently 23 pupils of primary age. One pupil is in the final year of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

### Main findings

Outstanding leadership by the headteacher, with excellent support from the senior leadership team, has ensured that the school has maintained the exceptional performance that was reported in the previous inspection. All staff work together as a dedicated team. They are fully involved in highly effective self-evaluation procedures, which are based on the careful analysis of pupils' progress. As a result, any underachievement is swiftly identified. For example, a group of Year 8 pupils were recently seen to be making less progress than expected in mathematics. Extra support for the pupils and teachers has ensured that they are now back on track to meet challenging targets. Such decisive action, along with the clear identification of key priorities for further development, shows that the school has outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

The school's data, and the impressive rate of learning seen in lessons, show that pupils are making outstanding progress. The school follows a policy of placing pupils with different needs, but of similar ages, in the same class. As a result, there is often a wide range of attainment in the class. However, teachers make excellent use of assessment to pitch work at the correct level for individual pupils and provide extra help and support when required. There are excellent links with outside agencies to provide further support. As one pupil rightly stated, 'Teachers know if you've got a problem. They understand your feelings and thoughts.' Pupils grow in self-esteem as they move through the school. Boys and girls blossom as they begin to experience success. Their increasing self-confidence is shown by their eagerness to contribute to class discussions, their willingness to listen to and support each other, and their high levels of concentration. Their behaviour during the inspection was impeccable. The end result is that all pupils gain a range of qualifications, including entry level, National Vocational Qualifications and GCSE passes, by the end of Year 11. A large majority continue into the sixth form. This provides important continuity for many pupils. The excellent sixth form curriculum enables them to continue their outstanding progress, gain vocational qualifications, and move successfully to further education, training or employment. These are impressive achievements for pupils who have experienced severe difficulties and trauma in their lives.

Provision for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. The range of toys and equipment is adequate but uninspiring, and there are relatively few opportunities for children to play and learn outdoors. Along with the cramped classroom, this restricts opportunities for child-initiated learning.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
  - increasing the range of resources to encourage more child-initiated, active learning
  - providing more opportunities for outdoor learning.

## How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1
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All groups of pupils with differing needs make similarly outstanding progress in lessons. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson, a boy who speaks English as an additional language enjoyed participating fully in grouping pictures of different animals on a Venn diagram. This was because a teaching assistant checked that he knew the names of the animals beforehand. Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning and are keen to support each other, whatever their difficulties. Year 7 pupils were heart-warmingly supportive of a boy with autism who was initially afraid of moving from one group in the class to another. They made him feel part of the group and he made excellent progress with the task. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties understand tasks fully because the teachers provide clear explanations and tailor tasks to meet their needs. Teachers ensure the equal participation and progress of boys and girls by directing questions evenly and ensuring they have time to reply. In all observed lessons, pupils with speech and language difficulties made excellent progress with speaking and listening skills, listening attentively to each other and contributing thoughtfully to class discussions.

Pupils enter the school with very low attainment because of their learning difficulties. Standards remain very low in all years by comparison with overall national figures, but pupils' learning and progress are outstanding. The large majority make at least one level of progress in English, mathematics and science during each Key Stage, and many do better than this. By comparison with their progress prior to joining the school, this represents impressive achievement. The files of looked after children show outstanding progress towards challenging targets. The school's data show that all groups of pupils make similar progress.

These are other key features of outcomes for pupils.

- Pupils feel very safe in school because they say there is no bullying or racism and, as seen in lessons, behaviour is excellent.
- Pupils are very aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles. They enjoy physical exercise, as shown by their regular use of the local gym, despite the lack of suitable accommodation in the school itself.
- Pupils are very willing to take on responsibilities in the school. The student

council makes an important contribution to decisions in the school. For example, pupils played a key role in deciding available choices on the revamped dinner menu. The input included advice from pupils from minority ethnic groups. Pupils clearly respect each other's cultures and traditions.

- Attendance is close to the average of mainstream schools, but this represents good attendance for many pupils, who are sometimes unavoidably absent because of their medical or emotional problems.
- Older pupils make excellent progress with workplace skills as a result of opportunities to participate in work-related learning, work experience, and Young Enterprise projects.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

## The quality of the school's work

Teachers' planning is meticulous. It is based on a clear understanding of pupils' prior learning and levels of attainment. Consequently, teachers pitch work at a suitably challenging level. They invariably share learning objectives with pupils at the start of lessons, and help them to evaluate how much they have learned at the end. They provide different activities and resources for pupils in the same class when necessary, to ensure that all can participate fully. One pupil summed this up by saying, 'The work is nearly always just hard enough.' Teachers involve teaching assistants fully in their planning, so that they can work effectively and support individuals and groups of pupils as required. They teach lessons at a brisk pace to maintain pupils' high levels of interest and motivation. They ask searching questions to check pupils' understanding. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is of high quality and provides valuable feedback about how well pupils have done and how they can improve.

Teachers use assessment very effectively to track and review pupils' progress. As a

<sup>1</sup> Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

result, they quickly identify any pupils who are not doing as well as expected, and provide extra support. Often, this is because a pupil is experiencing health related difficulties or emotional trauma. The school has excellent links with a wide range of agencies to provide swift access to focused professional support for pupils and their families, whenever required. Not surprisingly, many agencies have written to acknowledge the excellent working relationships that the school has established with them. The large majority of parents and carers express similar views about the excellent support, care and guidance that the school provides. In response to parents' comments, the school is currently reviewing the content of its termly reports.

The school places an appropriate emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills as part of the National Curriculum, especially during Key Stages 1 to 3. Alongside this, pupils benefit from a well-organised course in personal, social and health education. In Years 10 and 11, the school provides a range of opportunities that meet pupils' needs extremely well and ensure that all gain nationally recognised qualifications. Increasingly over the last year, links have been made with the sixth-form curriculum, so that students can begin to study vocational courses from Year 10 and build on them during Years 12, 13 and 14. This innovative, flexible curriculum meets individual pupils' needs very well.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	1
Effective assessment	1
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, with excellent support from senior staff, provides outstanding leadership. During a period of uncertainty in which there were proposals to remove provision for primary-aged pupils, she has maintained a clear vision and ambition for the future of the school. This includes a recent application for specialist school status. The leadership team has ensured that the school has developed excellent partnerships with schools and outside agencies, so that it is becoming a hub of knowledge and expertise for the county. Staff are dedicated to enhancing awareness of and support for the needs of vulnerable children and families in the local community. This is a sign of the school's strong commitment to promoting community cohesion. Safeguarding procedures are extremely rigorous. They include careful risk assessments for the most vulnerable pupils, which helps to ensure these pupils' welfare. There are precise care plans for children with medical needs.

All staff are involved in rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's work. This ensures that all pupils have equal chances to succeed, by giving them the high-quality teaching and support that they need. The results of the school's self-evaluation are shared with the governing body, although data are not presented as

clearly as they could be. It enables the governors to question and challenge the school's work, but not as precisely as they would like. The governing body also recognises the need to review and report the outcomes of school policies more frequently, and has developed procedures to ensure that this happens. Governors provide excellent support for the school, especially in explaining the school's work to the local community. Parent governors are leading parents in attempts to raise finance in order to improve accommodation.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

## Early Years Foundation Stage

There is one child in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It is therefore not appropriate to make an overall judgement about outcomes for children.

Teachers' planning clearly identifies learning goals, and these are based on an accurate assessment of children's individual needs. Adults observe children's progress closely and record it accurately to inform future planning. This also ensures that all areas of learning are covered. There is good teamwork with teaching assistants, who are fully involved in lesson planning. However, the school also has a limited range of equipment for children to enjoy, both indoors and in the small outdoor play area. Consequently, there are few opportunities for child-initiated activities, and staff tend to dominate and control most learning activities.

As in other areas of the school, excellent procedures ensure that care and welfare have a high priority. Close communication with parents and other early years providers helps children to settle into the school quickly. The coordinator with responsibility for managing the primary and early years provision monitors the work closely. She has a clear understanding of ways in which provision can be improved, and makes the best of the limited accommodation.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1E
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and	2



managed?	
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3

## Sixth form

The large majority of students move into the sixth form after completing Year 11. Since the last inspection, outstanding leadership and management by the head of the sixth form have resulted in further improvements to the curriculum. Courses build directly on the prior experiences of Year 11 pupils and meet students' needs extremely well. Excellent liaison with local colleges, businesses and training providers gives students the opportunity to study a range of vocational courses towards different levels of accreditation. These link closely with extended work experience for some students. Staff monitor the quality of off-site provision closely.

Students respond enthusiastically and make outstanding progress. In lessons, they take great pride in their work, completing portfolios of evidence carefully and systematically. Teachers have excellent relationships with students and very skilfully support them towards taking more responsibility for their own learning. In addition to vocational qualifications, all gain a personal finance award and adult literacy and numeracy awards. Selected students develop other skills needed for future employment by participating in a travel project, which boosts their confidence in using public transport and planning their travel. As a result of this outstanding provision, nearly all students who left the sixth form last year moved successfully into further education, training or employment.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1

## Views of parents and carers

A very high proportion of parents returned questionnaires to the inspector, despite being given short notice. There were 85 responses – well above the usual number for a school of this size. The vast majority of parents are extremely satisfied with the school overall. They consider that staff are caring, supportive and approachable. They feel that the school brings out the best in their children, and helps them to overcome their problems and become positive about their education. A few parents would like more detailed information about the progress that their children are making, and the school is rightly considering ways in which this can be achieved.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



02 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Furze Down School, Winslow, MK18 3BL

I really enjoyed visiting your school recently. I would like to thank you for being so welcoming, friendly and helpful. You told me that you get on very well with your teachers, which I could see during lessons and at lunchtime. I was really impressed with the way you obviously enjoy learning and concentrate so hard. You obviously want to succeed, and I feel sure that you will. I do not think you will be surprised when I tell you my main finding: the school provides you with an outstanding quality of education.

Teachers really care for you. They are determined to do the best that they can for you. As a result, you become much more confident and enjoy learning. Your behaviour is excellent. Those of you who are going through a difficult time in your lives make excellent progress in overcoming your difficulties. You make outstanding progress with your work as well. It was good to see that everyone gets a lot of awards and qualifications by the time they leave the school. Because of that, you can move successfully to further education, training or employment when you leave school.

To make the school even better I have made the following suggestions.

- Provide better resources and equipment for the youngest children in the school, so that they can learn better while they are playing and working.

With very best wishes for the future

Yours faithfully

William Robson  
Lead Inspector

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