

Samuel Pepys School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110951
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325260
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	88
Sixth form	21
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jenny Knight
Headteacher	Mrs Mandy Green
Date of previous school inspection	25 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Cromwell Road St Neots Cambridgeshire PE19 2EZ
Telephone number	01480 375012
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a special school for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. An increasing proportion of pupils have complex learning difficulties, including profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. A small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are taught in a mixed-age class with pupils at Key Stage 1. Students in the sixth form spend some of their time at Samuel Pepys School and some at St Neots Community College. Since the last inspection, the school has been awarded specialist status for cognition and learning. A new headteacher took up post at the beginning of this school year. A holiday play scheme operates for two weeks during the school's summer holidays but this provision is not managed by the governing body.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that has sustained and built on the many strengths identified at the last inspection. Senior leaders are largely accurate in judging the school's effectiveness and the vast majority of parents are highly satisfied with its work. They particularly praise 'the warm and friendly atmosphere' and 'the kindness and dedication' of the staff.

At the heart of the school's work is an outstanding curriculum, with many exemplary features. The school matches learning opportunities exceptionally well to the needs of individuals and groups of pupils. Older pupils have the opportunity to gain a wide range of qualifications. The school's specialist status has enabled it to develop excellent links with local mainstream schools and colleges, which make a major contribution to pupils' progress and personal development. It has made outstanding progress towards its specialist targets. Pupils' learning is enriched exceptionally well through educational visits, special events and visitors into school.

Pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities mean that standards are very low compared with schools nationally. Nevertheless, achievement and progress are good overall and outstanding in the sixth form and for pupils with the most complex learning difficulties. Throughout the school, pupils make exceptionally good progress in developing their communication skills. Teaching is good overall and outstanding in the sixth form. The school is working well in its efforts to bring all teaching up to a good level. In the EYFS, teaching is outstanding but children's achievement is good because the outdoor area does not support their learning sufficiently and parents are not kept well enough informed about how to support their child's development at home. The school's excellent partnership with the neighbouring community college and the broad range of activities on offer provide exceptionally well for students in the sixth form.

Pupils are happy and enthusiastic learners who work hard, do their best, and have an excellent understanding of how to follow healthy and safe lives. They have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning, enjoy school a great deal and have excellent relationships with the staff. Pupils are encouraged to be as independent as possible and by the end of their time in the sixth form, they are prepared exceptionally well for the future. The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils, and staff work extremely well with a range of therapists and other agencies.

Leadership and management are good. The newly appointed headteacher has a clear vision for the school and staff share a very strong commitment to making the school as good as possible for the pupils. There is a strong sense of purpose and teachers and teaching assistants work as a coherent team. As a result, the school's capacity to improve is good. Senior leaders gather a wealth of monitoring information and assessment data. However, this information is not always analysed as sharply as it could be in evaluating pupils' achievement and the school's effectiveness.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Whereas senior leaders believe that sixth form provision is good, inspection findings show that the school makes outstanding provision for students at post-16. Teaching is outstanding and students make exceptionally good progress in lessons. Their overall achievement is outstanding because the curriculum is both challenging and stimulating, matched precisely to their individual

needs. Students have the opportunity to gain a number of nationally recognised qualifications and gain a wide range of personal and practical skills to prepare them for employment or further training. They have extremely positive attitudes to learning, work hard and very much enjoy the activities provided. They benefit from excellent opportunities to develop their life skills, and their enterprise and team-working capabilities. Outstanding leadership means that the link with the neighbouring community college works exceptionally well. Sixth formers spend a substantial amount of time there and pursue courses alongside mainstream students. This gives them excellent opportunities to increase their confidence and social skills.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

This is the first time in a number of years that the school has had children under the age of five on its roll and staff are in the process of increasing their understanding of the new EYFS requirements. Nevertheless, provision is good because teaching is outstanding and children receive excellent individual support. Lessons are planned carefully and the curriculum is matched exceptionally well to the next steps in each child's learning. The EYFS is managed well and staff make imaginative use of practical and sensory resources to stimulate children's interest and to develop their ability to learn through play. The children receive excellent care, guidance and support and make outstanding progress in their personal, social and emotional development and in developing communication skills. There are good arrangements for settling children in when they join the EYFS. Parents receive satisfactory information about how well their children are doing, but they are not informed well enough as to how they could be effective partners in their children's learning at home. The school has rightly identified the need to develop its outdoor area to better support children's development and progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve provision in the EYFS by involving parents as active partners in their children's development and extending opportunities for learning in the outdoor area.
- Sharpen the way information gained from monitoring and assessment is used to judge school effectiveness, to evaluate pupil achievement and to drive continuous improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall, pupils make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans and achieve well. Most meet, and some exceed, the school's predictions for them in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Pupils with the most complex and profound learning needs make exceptional progress because of high quality individualised learning programmes. During their time at the school, pupils gain a range of practical and enterprise skills, including learning how to grow and sell vegetables, handle money and make decisions when planning meals. At Key Stage 4, pupils gain Entry Level certificates in a number of subjects and certificate modules in Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Transition Challenge Independence. In 2008, a small number also gained GCSE at A* to G in mathematics and certificates in food hygiene. In the sixth form, students gain Entry Level certificates in skills for working life, ASDAN Towards Independence certificates and a range of vocational skills. In most lessons, pupils' progress is good and at times outstanding. In the few lessons where teaching is only satisfactory, pupils' progress is at times slower than it should be.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding, reflecting the school's mission to create a place 'where laughter and joy are an essential part of the learning experience'. As a result, pupils enjoy school thoroughly. Parents praise the way the school builds their children's self-esteem and ensures that they become confident young people. Behaviour is outstanding and attendance is good. Pupils demonstrate their excellent understanding of the value of a healthy lifestyle through their take-up of healthy school meals and through team games and the daily programme of 'sensory circuits'. Pupils feel extremely safe in school because they enjoy very trusting relationships with the adults who care for them. All aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. The school takes pupils' views seriously and they contribute to decisions about issues affecting them. Pupils raise funds for charities at home and abroad, and gain valuable insights through a wide range of activities that promote their enterprise skills. For example, one group made and sold Christmas decorations to raise money for charity, while another worked alongside wardens on a local nature reserve. Others designed and built an outdoor classroom working alongside a local builder. The understanding they gain from this type of activity is supplemented by work experience in local supermarkets, charity shops and garden centres. The outstanding progress pupils make in developing their independence skills, their ability to work together and to communicate prepares them exceptionally well for future employment, further education or training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers plan their lessons well and are clear about what they want different groups of pupils to learn. They make outstanding use of practical resources and link learning to everyday experiences wherever possible. Teachers are skilled in asking questions and, where teaching is outstanding, make their expectations exceptionally clear to pupils. Staff challenge pupils well and lessons proceed at a good pace, especially where more able pupils are organised into groups according to their ability at Key Stage 3. Staff use communication aids and sensory resources extremely well to support the learning of pupils with the most complex needs and give them plenty of opportunity to make choices and express themselves. Occasionally, staff are unsure about how to convey new ideas to pupils and do not always choose the best methods to involve pupils actively in their own learning. Assessment is good. Teachers work very closely with therapists to assess pupils' individual needs and their personal targets are usually focused and specific, though their learning targets are not always as challenging as they could be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Excellent links with local schools provide pupils with outstanding opportunities to learn alongside their mainstream peers not only in the sixth form but also, for individuals, lower down the school. Samuel Pepys School provides opportunities for mainstream pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to attend its sessions, and college links give older pupils very good opportunities to develop vocational skills. For example, part-time attendance at local colleges enables them to gain practical skills in building, horticulture and plumbing. Each day begins with pupils taking part in a session of physical activity known as 'sensory circuits', which

is very effective in developing their thinking skills and minimising potential behavioural difficulties. The provision for developing pupils' basic literacy, numeracy and other key skills is highly effective. Through close collaboration with a range of therapists, the school provides exceptionally well for pupils who need specialised programmes and equipment to support their communication skills and overall development. It makes excellent use of ICT to promote pupils' learning. The curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop enterprise skills, and PSHE focuses exceptionally well on pupils' need to stay safe and healthy. The school provides an outstanding programme of enrichment activities, including educational visits, clubs and residential trips.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The commitment of the staff ensures that pupils receive outstanding care, guidance and support. Individual support programmes are planned very carefully and the school collaborates exceptionally well with a range of other agencies. A team of therapists and a wealth of special resources enable the school to provide support programmes very carefully tailored to the needs of individual pupils. Arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of pupils are rigorous. The school has responded extremely well to the increased number with complex needs, including those with autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of their lives through the school's careers guidance and transition arrangements. Procedures for tracking pupils' progress are good, and individual education plan targets help pupils to understand how well they are doing and what to do to improve. In some classes, pupils evaluate their own learning in detail, for example in Year 9 where a pilot project also involves parents in enhancing pupils' ability to reflect on their own learning and set targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior leaders provide very clear educational direction and the newly appointed headteacher has made a good start in identifying the school's strengths and areas where its work could be improved further. In the management of the school, she receives good support from the deputy headteacher, who also took up post quite recently, and the role of subject leaders is developing well. The leadership of outreach work, whereby staff support other schools, and of the school's specialist status work is outstanding. The school has made good improvement since the last inspection and gaining specialist status has particularly extended its outreach work and the way in which it works with therapists. The school promotes community cohesion well and it has carefully evaluated this aspect of its provision. It pays outstanding attention to ensuring all members of the school community are included and has excellent links with the local community. Plans to extend national and global links are at an early stage of development. The governing body is led very well by an experienced Chair and a number of governors provide valuable expertise. Governance is good overall because although extremely supportive, governors are developing ways of further challenging senior leaders. The school is well on its way to developing outstanding provision and self-evaluation is good, based on rigorous monitoring. It is not yet outstanding, however, because leaders do not analyse the resulting information or assessment data as well as they could to help bring about further improvements in pupil and school performance. The exception is in the school's outreach provision where self-evaluation is outstanding.

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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	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?	2	1
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2	

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	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?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
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	2
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	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	

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

22 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Samuel Pepys School, St Neots, PE19 2EZ

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We really enjoyed our visit and now I am writing to tell you what we found out about the school.

This is a good school and we could see why so many of your parents are pleased that you go to this school. All the teachers and other adults care about you and look after you really well. We were pleased to see how happy you are at school and you get a lot of enjoyment from all the interesting things there are to do. The school is particularly good at using its links with other schools and colleges to make learning exciting for you, and at working with therapists to support those of you who need more help. You are making good progress in your work and those of you who spend time at St Neots Community College gain a lot from it.

Your school is good because it is led well by Mandy and the other managers, and they want to make the school even better for you. We have asked them to:

- make the outside area more interesting for those of you who are aged two to five and get your parents more involved in your learning
- use all the information they collect about the school's work and how well pupils are progressing and to look more closely at what is working well and what could be improved.

We are pleased that you have such a good school to go to and hope that you keep on trying hard and enjoying all the lovely activities.

Yours sincerely

Ms M J Goodchild

Lead inspector