

Heathfield Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116607
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	326416
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2008
Reporting inspector	James Bowden

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	82
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	9
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Tina Woodcock
Headteacher	Mrs Christine Tuff
Date of previous school inspection	14 December 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Oldbury Way Fareham PO14 3BN
Telephone number	01329 845150
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Heathfield caters for learners with moderate learning difficulties (MLD). However, many have additional needs, including autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), physical disabilities and difficulties, sensory impairments, language delay/disorder and medical needs. Currently, a third of the learners has severe learning difficulties (SLD). Almost all have a statement of special educational need, with six undergoing assessment to establish their needs. There are about as twice as many boys as girls and very few are from ethnic minority groups. Learners can join the school at varying times throughout the year. Presently, nine are at the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) of learning. They are taught alongside Year 1 learners in a mixed age class.

The school first received the Investors in People award in 1997, with regular accreditation since. In 2006, it was the first special school in the country to receive UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools award. In 2007, it achieved enhanced healthy schools status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides very effectively for its learners and meets fully its aim of enabling all learners to maximise their potential in all aspects of their development within an inclusive environment. It is a calm but stimulating environment. The school has significant strengths. One major strength is the partnership with other schools and professionals. This enhances considerably the quality of learners' well-being and progress throughout the school. The school also works closely with parents, the great majority of whom are very appreciative of its work. One, expressing the sentiments of many others, commented, 'Heathfield has made the life of my child and family much more bearable because it understands and helps in every way possible.'

Learners' personal development, including the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects, is outstanding. They are involved in many ways in the life of the school, for example, through the school council and consultations over aspects of their learning. The majority have very positive attitudes and enjoy being at school. The palpable enjoyment of learners was very evident during the weekly whole-school singing session, both young and old joining in enthusiastically, especially with some of the songs sung by 'Queen'. The rendition of 'We are the champions' was particularly lively. The curriculum is highly effective across the school. Those in the EYFS stage are working towards the early learning goals of the new curriculum. For others it is particularly well organised to ensure it meets the individual needs of all. An extensive range of enrichment activities broadens learners' experiences particularly well. The school also provides high quality care, guidance and support for learners and is highly successful in supporting each individual in very specific ways. All, including the most vulnerable, are extremely well looked after in a safe, healthy and caring environment. There is particularly good recording of the progress learners make towards the academic and personal targets in their individual education plans (IEPs). However, these targets, unlike other information that is displayed on classroom walls, are not written in a clear enough and understandable form for learners.

Achievement overall is good. Although standards overall are very low because of the extent of learners' complex special needs, the progress they make is good. When they arrive, all learners operate at 'P' levels - levels that are below the standard National Curriculum levels in schools. By the time they leave, some are working at aspects of Level 3 of the National Curriculum. All are enabled to successfully move on to the next stage of their education in appropriate special schools.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan their lessons extremely well to ensure that the work is suitably pitched to challenge the full range of capabilities in their classes. Strong working relationships with learning support assistants (LSAs) underpin the quality of learning. They use good quality information and communication technology (ICT) resources to enliven learning, improve motivation and develop learners' communication skills. Learners of all ages are also enabled to improve their competencies in the use of ICT. They enjoy their lessons, one commenting, 'Teachers help us if we're stuck and need help.'

Leadership and management are good. There is a very strong ethos, which promotes learning, achievement, and high quality integrated care and education. There is robust monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. Because of this, achievement and high quality personal development are at the forefront of the school's work. The school's analysis of assessment data is well focussed and has enabled it to realise that the progress learners make in science,

particularly in investigation, is not as strong as it should be. Governance is good. Highly effective self-evaluation, other developments initiated by the recently appointed headteacher and her senior leadership team since the last inspection, along with the clear direction set for further improvement, shows there is excellent capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The school's provision for children in the EYFS is good. There is no separate EYFS provision because of small numbers, the range of learners' special needs and the varying times of the year when they join the school. Assessment on entry shows that standards are very low when compared to those expected for learners' ages. Provision is matched very carefully to each child's individual needs, which results in learners settling very well into school routines and, consequently, making good progress towards the early learning goals. All have individualised learning programmes based on 'small steps' through the 'P' levels with the main focus being on language and communication skills. This is supported by a lively learning environment, which includes signs, notices, labels, symbols and books. Learners' personal development is outstanding. They gain self-confidence and self-esteem, showing feelings and sensitivity to one another. Two children, for example, worked very well together, taking turns at choosing an 'animal' card to place in a post box. Those whose behaviour can be potentially challenging respond well to the patient approach of teachers and other adults. Teachers provide child initiated activities, as well as activities where the adult influences the context. Direct teaching activities in small groups and individual one-to-one time also contribute effectively to learning and development. The school reports that parents often comment informally to teachers and LSAs as to how well their children are progressing at home. However, there is no formal recording of this to enable a broader picture of learners' progress to be established. Learners' welfare receives high priority, ensuring they flourish in a safe and caring learning environment. Leadership and management are good, providing a rewarding and enjoyable experience, whilst at the same time focusing on improving achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve learners' progress in science across the school.
- Provide more formal opportunities for the involvement of parents in identifying the progress of their children in the EYFS stage.
- Ensure that learners are enabled to understand fully the key targets set for them in their IEPs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school's analysis of data shows a sustained trend in improving achievement within a context of learners' increasingly diverse and complex needs. Achievement is good. Larger percentages of learners are achieving their targets, for example, in reading and ICT. There are no significant differences in the achievements of different groups of learners. It has been recognised, however, that progress in science, particularly investigative work, is an area for improvement. Senior leaders are initiating strategies to address this concern.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Learners flourish because of the supportive ethos of the school. They understand the importance of healthy exercise and living, taking part enthusiastically in a wide range of physical activities throughout the year. Learners are also fully involved in devising menus for school lunches. Some feel, however, that there should be water coolers in every classroom. Attendance overall is average and unauthorised absence particularly low. Overall, behaviour is good and in any instances where this is not the case, learners respond well to staff interventions. Learners' good progress in communication and social skills, as well as improvements in their number and ICT skills eases their transition to the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers work very effectively with LSAs, all adults knowing their learners very well. All have a calm and supportive approach to encourage learning and apply the school's rewards and sanctions procedures effectively. This ensures that the occasional disturbance from individuals does not stop others learning. Activities are appropriate and enable learners to make progress towards the targets set in their IEPs. Effort and achievement are constantly rewarded and all adults in the room record in detail their assessments of learners' progress. Oral praise and encouragement were used extremely effectively in a 'Ruby' class physical education lesson where learners were exploring ways of 'travelling' across a range of apparatus. This motivated them very well and they were clearly proud of their achievements, as well as commenting favourably on the achievements of others. In some lessons, though the planned activities have engaged learners well, the lesson ends abruptly with no opportunity provided to recap what has been learned.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is very effective because there is a focus on learning throughout the whole day. There is a particularly strong focus on improving learners' key skills of language and communication, numeracy and ICT. It is also highly effective in developing their personal skills and attributes, which enables them to make good progress towards their academic and personal targets. This ensures they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. The high quality range of accommodation, including an indoor swimming pool, extensive grounds and outdoor play areas, enhances greatly the quality of provision and education they receive.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an exceptionally strong, collaborative, caring and supportive environment where learners feel safe, develop their personal qualities and make good progress. Learners' achievement and well-being are at the forefront of the school's ethos of care and education. Highly effective working relationships with a wide range of other specialist agencies and professionals contribute extensively. The dedication, enthusiasm and commitment of all staff in working with learners underpin this aspect of the school's provision. Learners' progress

towards the targets set in their IEPs is tracked carefully but the language of these targets is not learner-friendly, thus it is not always clear if they really know what their targets really are.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has not been adversely affected by staffing changes at senior level and other staffing issues beyond its control. The new headteacher has built on initiatives started at the time of the last inspection and involved more staff helping move the school forward. This has resulted in a very clear direction for the school, focused improvement planning and regular monitoring and evaluation of this. Assessment is being used to good effect in setting challenging targets for learners. Heathfield is a school in which every learner really matters. It contributes well to community cohesion, both within the school and locally. It is involved in developing outreach programmes as well as receiving visitors from the community, including learners, to the school. Although there have been recent changes to the governing body in terms of personnel and the way in which it works, governance is effective in its role as a supportive friend of the school.

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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?	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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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
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?	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	2
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
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?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
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
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**

03 November 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Heathfield Special School, Fareham, PO14 3BN

I recently visited your school for two days. I saw most of you arriving in the morning and leaving at the end of the day, as well as seeing you in lessons and other activities. I was very impressed by the friendly way you greeted me and the open way in which you chatted with me. I also chatted with a group of you. I was pleased to hear how well you enjoy the school and the activities it provides. I was also pleased to hear how you appreciate the help and support you are given and the many opportunities you have to be involved in the running of the school. Though you had some ideas for making things better, one of you then added, 'Apart from that, it's brilliant'. I also know that your parents are very pleased with the progress you make.

Heathfield is a good school. This is because:

- the headteacher and her senior staff lead the school really well
- during your time there you make good progress in your learning and personal development
- you improve your language and communication skills and become more confident
- you have many opportunities to be involved in running the school
- all the adults who work with you make sure you are safe and extremely well cared for
- all the adults who work with you are really dedicated, have your best interests at heart and want to make sure you do well in the future
- teachers make sure lessons are interesting and that you can cope with the work
- the curriculum and other activities make your education very interesting.

There are three things the school could do to make things even better for you:

- help you make better progress in science
- for those of you in the EYFS stage, involve your parents more in helping the school assess your progress
- make sure that the most important targets on your IEPs are written in a way you understand.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden

Lead Inspector