

# Whitfield School and Aspen Special Unit

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118459
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	326831
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 December 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jacque Buttriss

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.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	410
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
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Glynn M Stevens
<b>Headteacher</b>	Andrew Lamb
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 October 2005
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Mayfield Road Whitfield Dover CT16 3LJ

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<b>Age group</b>	2–11
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 December 2008
<b>Inspection number</b>	326831

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school, incorporating specialist provision (known as Aspen) for up to 54 pupils with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Attached to the specialist provision is a nursery for children aged two to four with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These pupils come from a wide area of Dover and its surroundings and include a number of children from Sure Start areas. Many of the pupils in Aspen classes need specialist provision and equipment, whilst a number of them are integrated into the main school classes for at least part of their learning. For some pupils with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, it is necessary to modify the curriculum to meet individual need. The Aspen classes mainly cater for pupils with severe, profound and multiple needs, autistic pupils, including those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties. Of the 357 pupils in the main school classes, the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. There is a very high proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need. There is an established breakfast club every morning. The school has just completed a major three year building project to provide a range of new facilities. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) children are in the Reception classes in the main part of the school and in the Aspen Roots nursery and the Aspen early years class. The school has a 'SIBS club' for pupils who have siblings with severe learning difficulties and or disabilities. There is a hydrotherapy pool for disabled children, which is also used by pupils throughout the school and by members of the local community. There is a new 'SMILE Centre' which is the regional hub for outreach and professional development services for educational professionals working with pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities throughout the Dover area.

## 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. It has many outstanding features. The most distinctive of these is the exceptionally successful integration of the specialist provision for pupils with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities into the main school. This provides a uniquely inclusive learning environment where Klaus Wedell's vision of 'Treating everyone equally, but not necessarily the same' is fully realised.

Good teaching enables pupils of all ages and abilities to make good progress and achieve well. Standards are broadly average overall. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and those in Aspen classes make outstanding progress in relation to their individual capabilities. The excellent curriculum is highly enriched by a number of additional learning opportunities for all pupils. 'Learning is fun,' agreed a number of Year 6 pupils. However, in a few classes, the introductions to lessons are occasionally overlong, with the result that some pupils lose interest.

There is no doubt that the outstanding personal development and well-being of pupils is greatly enhanced by the mutual benefits of mainstream pupils and those with disabilities freely learning, socialising and playing together. All members of the school community share and thrive on this inclusive ethos. Pupils and adults alike demonstrate enormous respect for one another and excellent relationships. As a result, the social development of pupils is outstanding, as is their spiritual, moral and cultural development. The outstanding care, guidance and support offered to pupils of all ages and abilities ensures that vulnerable pupils and their families are especially well supported and cared for. Parents are full of praise for the school's 'positive and nurturing environment'.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and stay safe. They enjoy all their school experiences enormously. Indeed, when asked if there was anything they did not like about this school, pupils said they could not think of anything at all. Attendance is good. One parent said, 'My son tells me every day how much he loves school and he literally "can't wait" to get there.' The behaviour of all pupils is exemplary. Through the active school council and the many responsibilities enthusiastically taken on by older pupils, as well as their reciprocal activities, all main school and Aspen pupils make a highly positive contribution to their school community. All learners leave this school well prepared for their future lives.

The excellent leadership of the headteacher and the very strong teamwork of the senior leadership team ensure that the school is well led and managed. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and its 'diverse and rich approach to lifelong learning', as one parent described it, whilst others commented: 'I am grateful every day that my children are in good hands and are being nurtured ... We could not wish for a better school.'

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Provision is good in the Reception classes and outstanding in the Aspen nursery and early years class. Good teaching and stimulating multi-sensory learning activities ensure that all children make at least good progress. Those in the Aspen Roots nursery and early years class achieve outstanding progress in relation to their capabilities. Both Aspen and main school EYFS classes are well equipped and imaginatively organised into rich learning environments, inside and out, with an inviting shared outdoor play area uniting them. Good quality planning ensures the

good development of independent learning, language, personal and social skills through a variety of motivating active learning experiences. Good transition arrangements help children to settle quickly and with enthusiasm into the Reception classes. They thoroughly enjoy their learning and are, as one parent put it, 'keen to share' their achievements with their parents and carers, who provide good support. The EYFS provision is managed well on a day-to-day basis, but the leadership of this important first stage in learning could be more clearly defined and focused on strategic development to help it improve still further.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Clarify and develop the role of the EYFS leader to lead the work of all nursery and Reception classes in order to give focused direction to enhancing provision.
- Improve the beginnings of lessons in some classes by shortening introductory sessions and making them more active to keep learners fully engaged.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Children come into the Reception classes with attainment generally below expectations. They make good progress so that by the time they leave Year 6 to go on to their secondary schools, standards are broadly average overall, with great variation across the unusually wide ability range. Those pupils in the main Year 6 classes reach above average standards. Achievement is good overall. Pupils in the Aspen classes achieve outstandingly well in the context of their often limited capabilities and complex needs. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the main school classes make good progress alongside their peers. More able pupils are appropriately challenged and achieve well.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Outstanding personal development and well-being are evident in many aspects of school life. Children enjoy explaining what makes a healthy lunch and how much exercise to take, and the school is working towards a Healthy School Award. Pupils certainly enjoy a good range of sports and PE activities. Pupils have excellent awareness of how to play safely together and whom to go to with any concerns. They proudly say there is no bullying. Because of the excellent relationships pupils make, and the great respect they show for each other, the children create a remarkable ethos of mutual understanding and social integration. As one parent commented, on behalf of many, this 'is not only wonderful for children with profound learning and physical difficulties, but our mainstream children too are brought up to have a natural understanding and acceptance for people who may be different from themselves'. Pupils' outstanding contribution to the community does not stop at the school gates. Indeed, they actively contribute to local events and have excellent links with schools in other parts of the UK and abroad.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The predominantly good teaching is carefully planned and learning is assessed very well so that tasks are suitably matched to pupils' very diverse needs. Teachers create a calm and purposeful atmosphere in which a lot of exciting learning is taking place. Lessons are fun, engaging, well

paced and challenging. Teachers have high expectations of what learners can do, so that pupils are eager to work hard and achieve well. A Year 4 pupil commented, 'I enjoy maths because it's challenging.' Learners are well motivated by relevant real-life learning situations. Teachers and teaching assistants have good questioning skills which encourage pupils to extend their thinking and their independent learning. However, in a few classes, the beginnings of lessons keep pupils sitting still for too long so that they are not sufficiently involved in active tasks and some lose their concentration.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

The outstanding curriculum offers pupils excellent opportunities to develop their team working, thinking and decision making skills. A wide range of approaches to learning, such as 'Thinking Activities in a Social Context', has a very positive impact on pupils' progress. Strong learning links with pupils at schools in Brent, Lewisham, Uganda and Norway involve pupils in corresponding individually with each other and learning a great deal about other children's lives and experiences in a variety of cultural contexts. Outstanding provision for music, sport, drama and art enables all pupils to shine and they enjoy participating in a variety of local events. Additional activities, visits and visitors provide excellent enrichment to the curriculum. There is outstanding use of writing across the curriculum and extensive use of information and communication technology to support other subjects. Students from a nearby secondary school regularly come in to provide support in some lessons, acting as good role-models for learners. Secondary school teachers regularly lead excellent lessons for older pupils in their specialist subjects. Provision is individually planned for many of the Aspen pupils so that their learning needs are outstandingly well met.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

An outstanding ethos of care pervades all aspects of school life, ensuring that the school functions as a highly harmonious community in which the quality of support is consistently excellent. All vulnerable pupils are outstandingly well cared for. Excellent links with outside agencies help to ensure that every pupil and family has the utmost support. The many well-trained and experienced professionals at this school freely offer their expertise to other schools on an outreach basis. Academic guidance is very strong. Pupils of all ages regularly evaluate their own progress and they know their individual learning targets. Most of their work is marked to include helpful suggestions for how they could improve.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leaders at all levels share a very strong vision of inclusion and achievement for all, which creates outstanding equality of opportunity and pervades everything the school does. The clear-sighted headteacher of the school and the dedicated headteacher of the specialist provision form a strong partnership with the leadership team to drive forward improvements and promote the well-being of all. Leaders make good use of challenging targets to raise standards, including carefully focused targets for the very small steps of progress achievable by pupils with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, targets could be even more challenging for a few younger pupils who are more able, to help them achieve even better. The school's

outstanding self-evaluation processes identify all the appropriate priorities to move the school forward. There have been a number of improvements since the last inspection, such as the dynamic development of the curriculum and the very systematic monitoring of teaching and learning by the senior leadership team. The capacity to make further improvements is good. There is outstanding community cohesion through excellent links with schools locally, nationally and in other countries, supporting pupils' learning of the cultures, faiths and social situations of others. Governors monitor provision effectively. They provide good support and challenge the school well.



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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	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
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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

<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	1
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	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**

12 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitfield and Aspen School, Dover CT16 3LJ

Thank you for being so friendly, polite and helpful when we came to inspect your school. You made us feel very welcome. We enjoyed talking with you. Yours is a good school. It helps you to do good work and cares for you outstandingly well.

These are the things we especially like about your school:

- You make good progress in your work. Well done!
- Your behaviour is excellent.
- Children in Aspen and other classes work and play extremely well together and greatly enjoy helping each other.
- You have excellent relationships and greatly respect each other.
- All the staff care for you outstandingly well.
- You have excellent links with pupils in schools in other parts of the UK and in other countries, which help you to understand other cultures and faiths.
- You have good teaching, which helps make your lessons exciting and fun.
- Your enjoyment of school is outstanding and you are keen to do your best.
- Your headteacher, teachers and governors are leading the school well and are working hard to make it even better.
- Your parents and carers tell us that they are very pleased you come to this school.

This is what I think your school could do even better:

- There could be a leader especially to focus on organising and improving learning for children in the Reception classes, the early years and the nursery.
- A few of the teachers could shorten the beginnings of some of your lessons so that you can be more active in your learning.

You could help by continuing to work hard and enjoy your lessons. I would like to wish you lots of success in your future learning. Keep up the good work!

Jacquie Buttriss Lead inspector