

Heathside School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124909
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328242
Inspection dates	24–25 June 2009
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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.
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
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	70
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	13
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Gordon Cochrane
Headteacher	Mr Odran Doran
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2006
Date of previous childcare inspection	November 2006
School address	Heath Lane Ipswich IP4 5SN
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited 12 lessons, held meetings with governors, staff, speech and language therapists, and medical staff, and engaged with pupils. The school's work, pupils' records and their portfolios of achievement were observed. The inspector also examined 19 parental questionnaires and 38 staff questionnaires.

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

- the way the school judges pupils' academic progress and improvement in their personal development
- the match of work to pupils' needs and how pupils' communication is supported through signs, symbols and technology
- the improvements in the planning of geography and history
- the impact of leaders' and governors' work on school improvement.

Information about the school

Heathside is a day special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties. A high proportion of pupils are autistic. The school also admits pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, although there are very few pupils with these needs at present. About a third of the pupils are dual registered and spend time in their local mainstream schools. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a fifth are from minority ethnic groups. In 2010 Heathside will merge with Belstead School to form an all-age special school. The school will eventually be located in new accommodation. The after-school and holiday club is part of the school's provision. This provision was also inspected.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Heathside is a good school. It is led by a headteacher with a clear vision and a tenacious drive for excellence, to ensure that the pupils get the best from school life. Parents and other professionals have great confidence in it. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection in relation to the monitoring of pupils' progress and the planning of geography and history. It is well on track, and has a good capacity to make further improvements in relation to its key priorities. The school's ethos is exceptionally strong; there is a high commitment from all staff to want to 'get it right'. They work very hard to do so. As a result, pupils thoroughly enjoy school, learn well and make good progress. This is because there are a wide variety of well-planned activities on and off site which interest and motivate the pupils. The excellent daily routines help them relax, anticipate what is to happen and give them confidence to try hard. The need to challenge pupils is carefully calculated so that pupils gain success because work and activities are closely matched to their individual needs.

Pupils make excellent progress in the Nursery, especially those who at first find it difficult to communicate, concentrate and behave appropriately. This is because the teaching, support and work of speech and language therapists are extremely well focused on pupils' individual needs. Good learning and progress are seen in the rest of the school where effective teaching, excellent relationships and strong support for communication help pupils learn to relate to others and grow in their understanding of the world around them. As a result, their personal development improves rapidly and they become very confident individuals, who are willing to take on the challenges of school life and learning. These features were seen in an outstanding swimming session where there was total trust by pupils in all the adults, and an excellent focus on what they were to do. The development of pupils' communication is of high priority. Signs and symbols are used well to support pupils and some are learning to use 'high tech' communication aids well. Information and communication technology (ICT) is planned and taught competently and pupils really enjoy using computers. However, staff do not always make full use of these in lessons and the development of pupils' skills in ICT is not fully recorded.

Some aspects of the school are outstanding. Excellent care, guidance and support ensure that pupils feel entirely safe. Through outstanding health promotion, care and dietary management, they are helped to keep as healthy as possible. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the community. They are able to make choices and become

willing participants with high levels of interest and cooperation. Their activities support local charities and charities in Gambia. Through their visits in the community and attendance at mainstream schools, they are 'ambassadors' for Heathside.

Assessment is thorough and staff have detailed knowledge of pupils' needs. At times, though, pupils' challenging targets are too numerous and difficult to measure because they are not precise enough. Although a new progress tracking system is helping to identify the trends and patterns in the progress that pupils make, it is based on information that is fed from the targets and so data is not always fully accurate. Some aspects of data analysis occur too infrequently.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to show the progress that pupils make ensure that:
 - the targets that are set for pupils are few in number, very precise and can be measured easily
 - pupils' records show the very small steps of learning that they make
 - progress for classes and the whole school is analysed and reviewed at least twice per year.

- Improve the use of ICT and the progress that pupils make by:
 - providing many more opportunities to use computers in lessons
 - ensuring that the specific targets towards making small steps of progress are reviewed regularly
 - assessing pupil's skills regularly.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enter the school with low levels of development and some have profound or complex physical and sensory needs. The school enables them to flourish, build their confidence and develop a great joy of learning. Indeed, parents reported that their children wanted to attend school during the holidays! They learn outstandingly well about themselves. They learn to trust and have confidence in all those around them. Behaviour is good and any challenging behaviour reduces quickly over time because it is managed well. Pupils develop well because signs, symbols and communication systems are used consistently throughout all activities and pupils know what to expect. These, and the progress they make in areas of learning, prepare them well for the next stage of school life.

It is the dedication of staff and the high quality training that they receive which enables pupils to build well on what they have learned previously. All pupils make outstanding progress in adopting healthy lifestyles through activities in the Nursery, swimming and the lunchtime eating and social programme. Staff are precise about what is to be learned and demonstrate high expectations consistently.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good and sometimes exceptional. The outstanding care and support in lessons cannot be underestimated. This ensures that lessons go smoothly and that pupils cope with the transition of moving from one activity to another, as well as to the next stage in their lives.

The school develops in pupils a willingness to learn and try new things, and to enjoy work. A very well measured pace to lessons is a key to successful learning. Another is the wide variety of different activities that occur in one lesson, to ensure pupils' high levels of interest and involvement. Pupils are always clear about what they need to learn because the staff present symbol sequences and set high expectations. Lessons are well planned although, like personal targets, some objectives are too general. Staff show that they know their pupils well. Each pupil's record of achievement gives a great insight into their development; sometimes, though, photographic captions are too descriptive and do not always illustrate what pupils have learned. Work is well matched to individual needs, especially when pupils are taught one to one. However, staff sometimes miss the opportunity to plan specifically for all aspects of a lesson, such as when pupils are engaged in imaginative play or in outdoor activities.

The curriculum has improved well since the last inspection. Planning is thorough and very relevant to pupils' needs and interests. Regular local visits add much to pupils' understanding of the world around them. These provide them with considerable social opportunities to be with, and to learn from others, especially those who attend their mainstream schools. Although ICT is used in lessons, the school recognises that its prominence needs raising, and planning and assessment need to be more systematic. The after-school provision is good and much valued by parents.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

This is a school which clearly knows where it is going and has a good ability to get there. The very strong drive to meet the needs of each individual pupil lies at the heart of the school's success. It is careful, despite some pupils' complex needs, that all pupils are provided with just the right activities to help them learn and make progress, often in very small steps. The headteacher bases school planning on well-informed feedback from a variety of sources, including good quality, regular monitoring of teaching by senior staff and subject leaders. Staff have every confidence in the school, its future and the headteacher, as seen by their very positive responses to the Ofsted pre-inspection survey. Excellent partnerships with parents and other external services ensure that Heathside always has the needs of the individual sharply in its sights. Parents are very well supported, through the fortnightly parent group meetings or by teachers and therapists. Heathside is at the heart of its local community. It celebrates the festivals of the cultures of its pupils and across the world, raises funds for a school in West Africa and reaches out to parents to support the management of pupils and their behaviour. There is a very strong drive to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils; the need of each individual pupil lies at the heart of the success. The school itself is a highly cohesive community, although governors have not evaluated the impact or developed a future strategy to continue this aspect of the school's work.

Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to safeguard pupils and detailed risk assessments are undertaken to protect the most vulnerable. There are good behaviour management procedures to deal effectively with pupils with challenging behaviour. Excellent attention is paid to pupils' health and their safety at all times.

Governors bring a good deal of expertise to the school. All statutory requirements are met and they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors are highly supportive. However, governors' knowledge about the challenges the school faces are not always the focus of governors' visits or meetings.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2

The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

All staff have extremely high regard for children's personal development and children make good progress in self-control, their ability to listen and concentrate. Care for children and their well-being are excellent features, especially the management of those with complex medical conditions. Children thoroughly enjoy activities and very close liaison with parents, pre-school services and partner schools help children to gain a very well rounded start to school life.

Provision is outstanding in the Nursery and good in the Reception class. Inspirational teaching, excellent organisation and deployment of staff, precise planning and high levels of individual attention in the Nursery, all work together superbly to help children make significant gains. In one lesson, extremely rapid progress was seen in the way a child followed instructions to identify numbers and carry out a series of tasks. His concentration was intense; he showed by his actions that he really reflected on what he was doing and was able to think for himself.

Good teaching was seen in the Reception class with well-planned and interesting activities provided. There was good support from assistants. Occasionally, there are missed opportunities to ensure that all children are watching and concentrating. This is partly related to the cramped nature of the Reception classroom. Nursery and Reception classes are taught in two separate locations in the school. There is close liaison between the Nursery leader and Reception class teacher so that planning and activities consistently follow similar approaches. The Nursery provides a high-quality learning environment with an excellent range of facilities. The outdoor area is extremely well laid out. This was less evident in the Reception play area. Given the range of children's needs, there is not always the provision of a quiet area.

Excellent attention to children's communication and ongoing assessment against their targets was seen in both classes. The work of speech and language therapists in lessons is a significant strength. It helps to model and reinforce children's language, as well as monitor and support staff in their use of communication approaches.

The provision is well led by the headteacher. Baseline assessment is detailed. Home visiting ensures a smooth start for children and the development of very positive relationships with parents. The Nursery leader makes a significant contribution to the running of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents have high regard for the work of the school and every confidence in the excellent care the pupils receive. One stated, 'Heathside is a fantastic school. Staff give of their best and are often the only support in caring for a disabled child.' A few parents were concerned about staff illness and that supply teachers have been teaching some classes. However, inspectors found that the school has done its best to manage the situation.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Heathside School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspector received 19 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 70 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	14	4	1	0

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:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
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.



26 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Heathside School, Ipswich, IP4 5SN

What a pleasure it was to come to your school and see how well you learn. You go to a good school because your headteacher and all the staff work hard to make it enjoyable. They want you to try your hardest and they make learning fun. You enjoy and try your best in lessons. You certainly make excellent progress at swimming.

Thank you for letting me sit with you at lunchtime. You like your food and you eat extremely healthily. You try very hard to follow what you are told to do in the dining room. This helps you to learn to eat by yourself but also to be with others at lunchtime. I was impressed with the way some of you who have jobs, such as clearing up, take them seriously.

Your teachers want you to improve how you talk, sign and communicate. They set you lots of targets and you work really hard to reach these. Sometimes, I think they could be even clearer and broken down into even smaller steps. I have asked the staff to do this. You enjoy using computers and I think that teachers could let you use them more often in lessons.

Thank you for a really enjoyable two days in your school.

Good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully

George Derby
Lead inspector

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