

# Harlow Fields School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131838
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	328649
<b>Inspection dates</b>	15–16 October 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Karin Heap

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>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	94
Sixth form	18
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	2
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Susan Davies
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	20 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>	Tendring Road Harlow Essex CM18 6RN
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 423670
<b>Fax number</b>	01279 431412

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<b>Age group</b>	3–19
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Since the last inspection in 2005 the school has experienced significant turbulence and its leadership has undergone major change over a period of 18 months. The new headteacher has been in post since September 2007 as her first headship; there are two new deputy headteachers in post since September 2008.

Pupils have a complex range of learning difficulties and disabilities, including profound and multiple learning difficulties, autism with severe communication difficulties and severe to moderate learning difficulties. There are almost twice as many pupils in the secondary department, where the majority have learning disabilities. The primary department has predominantly complex learning needs with significant physical and health-related disabilities. The school has a small proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds or are entitled to free school meals. A few pupils are looked after. There are two children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). At the time of the inspection these children were part of a class which included pupils up to 8 years of age.

In 1999 the school was amalgamated from three previous special schools and now is the only special school in Harlow.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Harlow Fields School is a satisfactory school with some developing strengths. Since the previous inspection, the school has undergone significant turbulence, resulting in the change of the school leadership following a period of temporary headships. The headteacher and staff have worked as an effective team to stabilise and improve the school. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form.

Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school, as one parent commented: 'My daughter is the happiest I have seen her since starting Harlow Fields School.' Parents appreciate the good level of care the school provides and the importance staff place on ensuring that pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Taking into consideration their complex and often challenging learning needs, pupils behave well in and around school. A good range of educational visits enriches the satisfactory curriculum. These visits enable pupils to learn through direct experiences; this is particularly evident in the secondary department and sixth form, where pupils increasingly learn practical skills in the community. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

On entry to school, the knowledge and skills of pupils are exceptionally low by comparison with the national average. Given their particular and specific needs, however, they make satisfactory progress. Pupils achieve well when they have the opportunity to complete tasks that offer a suitable level of challenge, build on their previous learning and allow them a degree of independence. However, this good practice, based on accurate assessment, is not yet consistent. Consequently, pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress during most of their time in school. Progress in the sixth form is good. Most students move on successfully to further education and training.

While there is some good teaching in the school, the overall quality is satisfactory. In the best lessons, where activities are appropriately matched to meet their diverse needs, learners make good progress and some learn independently. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Although pupils have individual learning plans, teachers do not make sufficient reference to them during lessons and when planning and marking work. As a result, pupils are not fully aware of how their targets will help them to make better progress and what they need to do to achieve them.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher demonstrates good leadership in setting a clear agenda for improvement and she is well supported by her newly appointed leadership team. With effective support from the local authority, the school has maintained a caring and supportive learning environment during a period of high turbulence. As a result of the strong focus on improvement in teaching, all lessons are now at least satisfactory and many are good. The curriculum does not yet link up with the school's work on assessment and tracking. Subject leaders are only beginning to ensure that curriculum planning is based on secure knowledge of pupils' attainment and progress in order to improve learning. Governors make a positive contribution to the school. They provide satisfactory support and challenge and accurately identify strengths and weaknesses of the school. Sound self-evaluation and the many recent improvements indicate that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

In the sixth form, students make good progress because the curriculum and the range of courses meet their needs well. The school recognises, rightly, that its procedures to monitor the stages of their progress are not sufficiently refined and pupils are not involved enough in setting and assessing their own targets. All students attain qualifications in soundly challenging courses; most who left school in 2007 and 2008 went on to education, training or employment. Students are taught well through individualised learning programmes. They receive appropriate guidance to help them make effective choices as to their next career or educational steps. Extensive work experience programmes prepare students very well personally for the world of work, and practical learning activities provide an exciting mix of educational experience. The sixth form is well led and managed, demonstrated in the perceptive forward planning that has enabled the development of a curriculum that meets the needs of a wide range of abilities effectively.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 3**

This provision is currently under sound but temporary management due to staff absence. Individual education plans ensure that all children who have different complex and challenging needs receive good care, welfare and support from staff and enjoy their learning. The EYFS Curriculum underpins the suitable planning of learning activities and children have ready access to indoor and outdoor play and learning areas. Many of these activities meet their needs satisfactorily; for example, getting enjoyment from exploring the texture of sand. However, in some cases, the range of activities is not accurately matched to individual needs and children therefore make only satisfactory progress. On occasions, for example, they are expected to perform accurate tasks with pencils and paper when they need more time to make patterns with larger and more colourful materials.

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

- Strengthen the role of the subject leaders in improving learning.
- Improve the use of assessment data to help teachers plan more effectively to meet the learning needs of all pupils.
- Accelerate pupils' learning through improved marking and through sharing accurate learning targets with individual pupils.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Knowledge, understanding and skills for pupils when they join the school are exceptionally low by comparison with those achieved nationally; this is due to the nature and complexity of their needs. Relative to their starting points pupils make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Most pupils leave school with successful placements in education or training, having matured into well-rounded and confident young people. Nevertheless, their academic attainment remains low when they leave.

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

### **Grade: 2**

The pupils enjoy coming to school, which helps teachers to engage them in lessons. For example, one parent said that her son had hated school until he started at Harlow Fields, and now even wants to go during holiday time. Behaviour is good and any incidents of challenging behaviour are dealt with effectively. Attendance is satisfactory; the school does what it can to discourage absence. Pupils do not think that bullying is a problem and have a trusted adult to turn to if in trouble or distress. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with strengths in the quality of relationships. The school council makes a good contribution to school life, for example, creating a shelter in the playground.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

There are many good elements to the overall satisfactory teaching and learning. Teachers and support staff know pupils well and ensure that their social and emotional needs are met effectively. In good lessons, all pupils are sufficiently challenged and make good progress because the learning activities are well matched to individual abilities. This, however, is not yet consistent and some lessons lack rigour and focus to ensure that all pupils learn as well as they could. Planning is not yet consistent and well-informed by knowledge of pupils' earlier learning and therefore not all activities are suitably challenging. Strong relationships exist between pupils and adults and, where pupils are engaged in a practical way, they excel and enjoy their learning. Teachers use praise effectively to stimulate and motivate pupils, who feel that adults help them to give their best.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The school provides a suitable curriculum for all age groups, enriched by a good range of visits and activities on- and off-site. For example, pupils enjoy drama productions by visiting professionals and join main-stream schools for sporting activities. Subjects are planned systematically across the school. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is promoted at appropriate levels for each age group. The successful use of individual learning plans ensures that pupils develop good independence and self-confidence. There are examples of recent, successful curriculum developments in practical science, leading to good progress for pupils aged 14 and 15. The school makes good use of its information and communication technology (ICT) suite. However, not all classrooms are suitably equipped to encourage the regular use of ICT to support learning in the classroom.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

Good care and support are given to all pupils to help them overcome their barriers to learning. Teachers and support staff work unstintingly to ensure that all pupils feel secure and make sound progress towards their personal learning targets. The school provides a safe and stimulating learning environment and complies fully with all requirements for risk assessments and safeguarding procedures. Healthy living is promoted well, and pupils are made aware of

the dangers present in society, including by appropriate drugs education. The guidance given to pupils on how to improve their learning is good at Key Stage 4 and post-16. In the rest of the school, academic guidance and support are less well developed. Pupils are not always told what to do to learn better.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The headteacher and her leadership team set a very clear direction and are actively focused on improvement. The headteacher's strong commitment and vision have ensured that the school is beginning to bring about necessary school improvements after a time of significant turbulence. Sound self-evaluation has ensured that leaders have correctly identified areas for improvement. For example, effective assessment and monitoring strategies have been implemented and senior leaders use these appropriately to analyse the progress made by groups of pupils. However, these strategies are yet to be firmly established in all areas of the school. This is especially relevant for subject leaders, who are just beginning to use assessment to track pupils' progress in their subjects. The school has taken appropriate and effective action to introduce new staff in response to staff changes in recent months. Governors offer a range of additional skills and make a sound contribution through good support and by increasingly challenging the school. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion; it has strong links with other partners and local schools and is increasingly developing national and global links.

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**Annex A**

**Inspection judgements**

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	2
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2

**Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

<b>How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?</b>	3	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3	

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

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<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>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
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?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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**

17 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of the Harlow Fields School, Harlow CM18 6RN

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We really enjoyed our time with you and talking to you about your work. It was great to see how much you enjoy coming to school and how well you behave. You are all very friendly and polite and helped us feel at home in your school. Thank you for sharing your work with us.

You work hard in your lessons, you enjoy learning and you are keen to help each other. One example is the good work of your school council to create a school shelter in your playground.

The headteacher, your teachers and all the other adults who work with you take care of you and want you to do your best. You are learning many new things to become prepared for when you leave school. You are doing well in learning how to work together, helping each other and keeping healthy and safe.

We have asked Ms. Davies and the teachers to make sure that they know exactly what they need to teach you in all the subjects and that they should check how well you learn in all of your activities. Your teachers should also make sure that you know your learning targets and understand what to do next to learn even better. We want you to enjoy your lessons even more and learn as well as you can.

We will take away many good memories about your school and have really enjoyed the time we have spent with you. Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly.

Karin Heap

Lead inspector