

Spring Common School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110946
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	337602
Inspection dates	28–29 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	138
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judy Ward
Headteacher	Kim Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	24 June 2008
School address	American Lane Huntingdon Cambridgeshire
Telephone number	01480 377403
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out two additional inspectors. Eleven lessons were observed and nine teachers were seen. Meetings were held with staff and the Chair of the Governing Body. Discussion took place with pupils and by telephone with a very few parents. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at assessment data, self-evaluation and monitoring information, teachers' planning and safeguarding documentation. Forty-six parental questionnaires were analysed as well as those from staff and pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well the school challenges its more able pupils and meets the needs of those with the most complex difficulties
- the particular features of provision that give rise to positive progress evident in recent performance data
- how well governors and leaders at all levels contribute to driving school improvement.

Information about the school

This is a special school for pupils with a very wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include moderate, severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, physical disabilities, medical conditions and visual, hearing and multi-sensory impairment. The number of pupils with moderate learning difficulties is declining and the school caters for an increasing proportion with complex needs. There are over twice as many boys as girls. The proportion of pupils of minority ethnic heritage and who speak English as an additional language is a little below average. A high proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals.

When the school was inspected in June 2008, it was judged to be satisfactory and taken out of special measures. A subsequent inspection monitoring visit in July 2009 found that the school had made good improvement over the previous year and was well placed to improve further.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good and improving school. The headteacher provides very strong direction for its work and has systematically transformed many aspects of provision since she was appointed to take the school out of special measures. The momentum for development established over that time has been sustained and the school has made good improvement since the last inspection and last year's monitoring visit. Self-evaluation is accurate and senior leaders are rigorous in identifying development priorities, for instance, in pinpointing what needs to be done now to move practice from good to outstanding. The tracking and analysis of pupils' progress is thorough and leaders make very good use of assessment information to bring about improvement. These factors ensure that the school is well placed to improve further.

Pupils enjoy school and make good progress in their personal development. Inspection findings and the school's own data show that they achieve well as a result of good teaching and a curriculum that is matched closely to the very wide range of individual needs. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Opportunities for parents of this age group to contribute to the assessment of their children are satisfactory and initiatives to promote seamless learning between home and school are developing. Teachers use assessment information well in planning their lessons, and pupils now have precise targets in their individual education plans. Outstanding provision is made for students at post-16, including through some exceptionally good opportunities to take part in work-related learning. Work experience is extended to pupils at Key Stage 4 and planning to support students when they leave the school is exceptionally thorough.

As a consequence, all pupils leaving school in recent years have either transferred to employment or further education.

In addition to returning the parental questionnaire, a number of parents and carers wrote to the inspection team expressing their views about the school. A large majority said that they are happy with the provision the school makes for their children, but a minority expressed dissatisfaction with at least some aspects of the school's work. Their comments centred particularly around how staff communicate with them and respond to their concerns and suggestions. Inspection findings indicate that partnership with parents is satisfactory. The school has a range of procedures in place for informing parents and involving them. For example, it provides termly information about topics their children will be studying, issues frequent newsletters, conducts surveys to gather their views, and involves them in reviewing their children's progress and setting new targets. It has tried various methods of engaging particular groups of parents through workshops, a parent consultation group and other activities, with limited take-up.

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Home-school diaries are not always as informative as they could be, however, in sharing information about children's learning, and methods for making parents aware of the thinking behind decisions and developments have not succeeded in engaging all groups. Governors support the school well and share the headteacher's commitment to making the school as good as possible. They receive detailed information from senior leaders about its work and have satisfactory methods of finding out about school effectiveness for themselves. There have been some changes in the membership of the governing body, and increasing governors' contribution to strategic development has, rightly, been identified as the next area for development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen partnership with parents by:
 - introducing comprehensive systems for involving parents of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in their ongoing assessment and learning
 - refining methods of communicating with parents by making home-school diaries more informative and reasons for decisions more transparent
 - using a wider range of strategies to encourage more parents, including those who are hard to reach, to contribute to school improvement.
- Develop the role of the governing body by:
 - increasing governors' involvement in establishing a strategic vision for the school
 - extending the way in which governors gather information for themselves in order to draw conclusions about school effectiveness.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

All groups of pupils achieve well, including more able pupils, those with complex needs and autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils of minority ethnic heritage and who speak English as an additional language do as well as their classmates. There has been an upward trend in pupils' progress since the last inspection. The school's own data shows that pupils make good progress and do exceptionally well in English and communication from Year 7 onwards. This was evident in lessons observed. For instance, pupils in Year 8 applied themselves extremely well, producing extended written accounts of a class visit, which they read out confidently to the rest of the class. The development of specialist facilities has contributed to improved progress in science. Specialist teaching and the many opportunities to go on trips and work with visiting experts extend pupils' learning. This is particularly evident in writing and in the attractive displays of artwork around the school. Achievement at Key Stage 4 and post-16 is recognised through the award of a wide range of accreditation.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their above average attendance, enthusiasm for learning and positive attitudes. Almost all pupils say that they feel safe and they

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respond exceptionally well to the school's efforts to promote healthy living, reflected in the achievement of the Activemark award and National Healthy Schools status. Behaviour is good in class and around the school, and some pupils behave exceptionally well. They develop good learning skills and many concentrate for long periods in lessons. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and the local community, for example, helping to design a play area for Godmanchester Council, taking part in gardening events and in the production of a large-scale art work as part of a local festival. They entertain others through music and singing and are involved in a range of conservation activities, reflected in the school gaining the Eco-Schools Bronze award. Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident in their increasing confidence and raised self-esteem as they move through the school, their improved social interaction skills and their appreciation and developing awareness of different cultures. Outstanding arrangements for work-related learning and good progress in basic skills, prepares pupils well for the future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good in the school as a whole and outstanding in the sixth form. Teachers use assessment to plan work for different groups of pupils based on their prior attainment, and they use teaching assistants well to support pupils' individual needs. Lessons are purposeful and teachers' high expectations nearly always ensure that pupils apply themselves and work for sustained periods of time. At times, work set for different groups of pupils and the pace of learning when pupils come together as a whole class could provide a little more challenge for the most able. This has not been identified by the inspection as an area for improvement, however, because the school is already working in a very concerted manner to improve teaching from good to outstanding. It has very thorough systems for regularly checking pupils' progress and senior leaders meet with teachers several times a year to discuss ways of accelerating achievement. The curriculum is matched well to the wide range of personal and learning needs, and the school has adapted its accommodation very effectively to provide a number of specialist facilities, for instance, to support pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, sensory impairment, communication difficulties, physical needs and medical conditions. The outdoor area is used imaginatively and the establishment of a number of different garden areas supports work on the environment and enables pupils to develop a range of practical and personal skills. There are good opportunities for more able pupils to spend some of their time in mainstream school and for older pupils to attend college. The school works closely with a very wide range of therapists, visiting specialists and outside agencies. It provides excellent care plans and very well-thought-out individual programmes to enable pupils to receive therapy alongside their taught time to minimise disruption to learning. Pupils know that members of staff will readily help them but despite many outstanding features in the way the school cares for, supports and guides its pupils, a small minority of parents and carers express lack of confidence in the school. This means that it is not able to establish the very close trusting relationship with all parents and carers found in the highest quality provision.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: 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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is committed to ensuring provision develops equally well for all groups of pupils, whilst effective teamwork ensures that senior leaders' ambition for the school

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is translated into systematic action. Reorganisation has increased the way responsibilities are distributed amongst the staff, and this has contributed well to the school's capacity to improve. Subject leadership is good, with particularly strong examples in English, mathematics and art and design. Lesson observation is frequent and rigorous, and inspection findings closely reflect senior leaders' existing knowledge of teaching. There are thorough systems in place for supporting less experienced staff and the school has used training to very good effect to ensure staff meet the increasingly complex needs of its pupils. Staff leading provision for pupils with particular types of difficulty undertake specialist training to increase their expertise and provide valuable support to their colleagues. The school has good procedures in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe. It thoroughly identifies risks and ensures that staff receive up-to-date training to extend their awareness.

Spring Common works increasingly well in partnership with other educational establishments and has extended the scope of its outreach support to other schools since the last inspection. Links with businesses and community organisations broaden the opportunities open to pupils and greatly facilitate transition planning when pupils leave school. Spring Common is a harmonious community where pupils with a very diverse range of needs are included and given equal opportunity to succeed. The school promotes community cohesion well. There are close links with the local community and global links that raise pupils' awareness of life in very different parts of the world.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
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

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Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress and learn and play happily together. They are well cared for and provision has improved since the last inspection. The school is continuing to develop the outdoor area; already, children enjoy good access to stimulating activities both indoors and out. Teaching is good and valuable interactions between adults and individual children promote their communication and social skills well. Assessment procedures are effective but do not involve parents as closely as they should. There are satisfactory systems for making parents aware of the next steps in their children's development and how they might support this at home but the school has, rightly, identified this as an area for development. The recently appointed Early Years Foundation Stage leader has made a good start in developing provision and has clear plans for further improvement.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
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 of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

Students in the sixth form make outstanding progress in a wide range of accredited courses, in their independence skills and personal development, which is reflected in their all transferring successfully to full-time further education or employment when they leave school. Outstanding partnerships with local businesses and organisations to develop skills of enterprise are strong features of the excellent curriculum. The outstanding provision for work-related learning and independent living is reflected in the 'restaurant days' where some students have been offered employment at weekends in a high class local hotel. Teaching is outstanding, with very careful attention to meeting individual needs. Exceptional leadership has led to sustained improvements year on year to the curriculum, partnerships, resources, the quality of care, guidance and support and teaching. The high quality of provision is also reflected in a good level of parental satisfaction at post-16.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

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Views of parents and carers

Of those parents and carers who returned questionnaires, a large majority express satisfaction with the quality of education provided, particularly those with children in the sixth form. Nearly all parents say that their children enjoy school, that it keeps them safe and helps them to have a healthy lifestyle. Inspection findings support parents' positive views. A small minority of parents and carers criticise the way the school meets their children's needs, takes their suggestions and concerns into account, and helps them to support their children's learning. They would like more information and do not think that their children are making enough progress. In addition to the parents who expressed dissatisfaction with some aspects of the school's work through the questionnaire, others wrote to the inspection team concerning particular issues. Lesson observation and assessment information confirm that pupils make good progress and the school provides well for the wide range of individual needs. The school uses a range of different methods for keeping parents and carers informed but the inspection team recognises that some would like more information or further explanation, and the school could do more to help parents to support their children's learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Spring Common School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 46 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 136 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	59	17	37	1	2	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	25	54	19	41	0	0	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	25	54	12	26	7	15	2	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	37	16	35	4	9	5	11
The teaching is good at this school	21	46	16	35	2	4	2	4
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	41	16	35	7	15	3	7
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	46	19	41	2	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	20	43	19	41	4	9	2	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	50	12	26	8	17	3	7
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	39	18	39	3	7	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	39	16	35	7	15	3	7
The school is led and managed effectively	20	43	13	28	5	11	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	23	50	16	35	5	11	2	4

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Dear Pupils

Inspection of Spring Common School, Huntingdon, PE29 1TQ

Thank you for making us welcome when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and seeing all the work that you have been doing. We found that you go to a good school that is continuing to improve.

You make good progress because your teachers plan lessons carefully and the adults help you when you need it. We were particularly impressed with your writing and I enjoyed hearing those of you in Year 8 read about your trip to Cambridge. The school gives you plenty of opportunities to go on trips, and you learn a lot about how to live healthily. Those of you in the sixth form make fantastic progress, and you have really good chances to find out about work and what it is like to do a job. In all the classes, the staff look after you well and care about you. We were pleased to see how well you get on together and how hard you try in lessons.

Your headteacher, teachers and the other people who work in the school are always working to make it better for you. We want to help them with this so we have asked them to:

- find ways to work more closely with your parents and carers
- make sure the governors are closely involved in checking how well the school is doing and in planning for the future.

Make sure you carry on working hard and doing your very best, just as you do now, and enjoy the rest of your time at the school.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector

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