

Heathlands School for the Deaf

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117685
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339047
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.
The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Rona Tutt
Headteacher	Ms Mabel G Davis
Date of previous school inspection	2 March 2007
School address	Heathlands Drive St Albans AL3 5AY
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Boarding provision	Heathlands
Social care Unique Reference Number	SC056396
Social care inspector	Kay Mehrstens

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Introduction

This integrated inspection of the school and residential provision was carried out by three additional inspectors and an inspector of social care. The inspectors visited 18 lessons in school and activities in the boarding provision, and held meetings and discussions with governors, staff, groups of pupils and parents. They observed the school's work, scrutinised documentation provided by the school and examined 29 questionnaires returned from parents and carers.

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

- how the school collects and analyses information about pupils' progress over time and in different subjects and how this then affects the ways in which it prioritises its work
- the ways in which the school's specialist status has improved its provision and the opportunities for pupils to be included in partner schools and in the community
- how the school provides for its youngest children and monitors their progress
- the quality of the residential provision and how it contributes to pupils' learning and well being.

Information about the school

This is a day and residential school for pupils aged 2 to 16 years who are deaf. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs with 'a requirement for sign language to access the curriculum'. The school is on three sites in St Albans, Hertfordshire but draws its pupils from all over the South East of England and the Midlands and sometimes further afield. The secondary provision is based within two other schools. These are 'Heathlands at Townsend Comprehensive' and 'Heathlands at St Luke's', a community special school. Pupils are from a broad range of social and economic backgrounds. They are mainly of White British Heritage, although about a quarter of pupils are from other heritages such as Asian or eastern European backgrounds. About a fifth has additional and sometimes complex needs additional to their hearing loss and particularly in the primary school. A similar percentage is boarders. In September 2008 the school was awarded specialist school status for Physical and Sensory needs.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school which provides an exceptional level of care, guidance and support for pupils. Parents, carers and pupils value it highly and rightly so. The exceptional drive, enthusiasm and commitment of the headteacher and the leadership team mean that it never 'rests on its laurels,' but is constantly seeking to achieve even more for its pupils. Leaders and managers systematically check on how well the school is doing, that everyone is achieving what they should be and grasp new initiatives. For example, since the last inspection the school has used the resources gained through its specialist school status highly effectively, opening its British Sign Language training centre, strengthening its links with partner schools and ensuring pupils have even more opportunities to learn, to achieve and be included. It has adapted its management structure and individual responsibilities so that aspects of its work such as the monitoring of teaching and learning and the revised curriculum are even stronger. All groups of staff have the opportunity to be more actively involved in the school's development through focus groups. Governance, too, continues to be outstanding. Individual governors bring particular skills and talents to the school, such as in finance or safeguarding, but also collectively ensuring that the school is challenged to do even better. All this confirms the school's outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. Pupils' outcomes are outstanding. Their behaviour and the ways in which the 'dialogue for learning' ensures pupils take responsibility for their own learning mean that not a moment is lost and pupils are extremely well set up for further learning when they leave. Overall achievement is good. Almost all pupils enter the school with very low starting points, especially with regard to their communication skills. Some also enter the school very late in their educational careers. Pupils make excellent progress, especially in English and their communication skills. Pupils' learning, development and progress are outstanding at each key stage, in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for all groups regardless of their backgrounds or needs. Indeed a small but significant minority do attain nationally expected levels for their age, because of the outstanding teaching and the ways in which the school personalises every pupil's learning programme. Safeguarding arrangements are excellent, the school is meticulous in ensuring pupils' safety and in helping them to understand how to live a healthy life and keep safe. Pupils say they are listened to and feel valued, as indeed is every member of the school community whatever their need or background. Pupils really try their best and their behaviour is excellent, even for those for whom this was a problem before entering the school. The curriculum is now outstanding. The primary curriculum, based around themes, excites pupils' curiosity and motivates them to 'have a go'. The secondary curriculum is highly relevant and benefits from the close links with host schools and their

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determination to include Heathlands pupils' and meet their needs through joint planning, staff training and the more formal systems put in place since the last inspection. The school's work with its community partners, particularly through its British Sign Language Centre has both strengthened the learning of its own pupils and of other learners in partner schools and is contributing very well to community cohesion locally. This is all linked to the school's excellent partnership working, already outstanding at the last inspection but improved even more, because of the school's specialist status. There are some good examples of work at national and international level, particularly around disability issues and deaf awareness but planning, documenting and evaluating the impact of these is less systematic.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend further the school's community cohesion planning and the ways in which it is evaluated, particularly in relation to pupils' understanding of and involvement with other communities nationally and internationally.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

The school's assessment information clearly demonstrates the level of pupils' attainment to be improving year on year and that progress from their starting points is outstanding. The academic standards and qualifications achieved by pupils at Heathlands at Townsend and Heathlands at St Luke's are increasing and four pupils achieved grades A to C in English Literature last year, including two at grade A. There are many examples of individual and groups successes in subjects such as mathematics, science, history, drama, art and design, food technology, as well as in a new course, Preparation for Working Life. Individual pupils in the primary department attained levels close to those expected of others of their age particularly in speaking and listening (signing and watching) and in their reading. A particular emphasis on the application of their reading, writing and mathematical skills in all subjects is really helping pupils to develop these further.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Staff's high expectations of pupils' involvement and behaviour, excellent assemblies and personal, social, health education programmes ensure pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe, how to live healthy lifestyles and of people's different values and beliefs. Pupils develop a strong sense of morality and an excellent work ethos, often encouraging each other to keep on task. One Year 4 pupil explained to another, for example, why coming to school is important if everyone is to have choices later. Pupils' attendance is good; pupils say they don't like to miss school and their parents agree although a few take their children out of school during the term times and this lowers attendance rates. Pupils develop an excellent sense of personal and community responsibility, taking part in community and school events with enthusiasm. The school's specialist school status and the opportunities this and their extensive partnerships have brought, have enabled them to shine in a number of areas including joint projects with

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their hearing classmates. This includes helping in the teaching of British Sign Language, drama and sports leadership opportunities and awards. Pupils say these all help them to feel more confident of the contributions they can make.

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	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Pupils say the teaching is 'brilliant' and 'fun' and that the teachers make learning so interesting that it is 'easy to learn'. The leadership team evaluates teaching across the school as outstanding overall and inspection evidence supports this view. Staff have expert knowledge of how to support the learning of children who are deaf and in the use of sign language to support this. They have excellent understanding of the different subjects they teach and use the assessment information they have about individual children extremely well to plan lessons. Staff throughout the school are adept at involving pupils actively in lessons and bringing learning to life, through well targeted questions and excellent visual aids. Excellent team work between staff at the different host schools, good attention to specialist training for mainstream teachers and excellent support from learning assistants/ communicators means that pupils progress very well in

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

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these classes too. The strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy, personal and social development and information and communication technology is paying off in pupils' improved achievements. In primary and early years the new thematic curriculum is enriched by inclusion opportunities with local schools and many visits, visitors and theme days and weeks. Year 5 pupils for example have work experience opportunities within the school, which really help them to understand more about the world of work. The range of courses and different awards available to pupils at secondary level has been extended both in the separate departments and in the host mainstream schools. Excellent inclusion opportunities and shared projects such as for a Shakespeare festival support learning, friendships and mutual understanding extremely well.

High quality learning experiences are further strengthened by the school's excellent partnership working, already outstanding at the last inspection but improved even more, because of the school's specialist status. Similarly other aspects of care, support and guidance such as work with other agencies and therapists, hospitals and the local authority audiologist are also very strong, supporting and safeguarding pupils' well being extremely well. Excellent links with the boarding provision secure this further.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Staff say they are proud to work at this school and are inspired by the headteacher's leadership and energy. Leaders have created a vibrant learning community in which governors and all staff are highly ambitious for individual pupils and for the school as a whole. They also ensure that pupils are kept extremely safe and procedures for safeguarding pupils are excellent. The ways in which teams work together in classrooms, in the residence and on the different sites with mainstream staff demonstrate this clearly. The host mainstream schools are hugely committed to the success of the inclusion initiatives and to Heathlands pupils, including looking for where pupils could be included even more. Community cohesion is good and the school is looking to extend this further. Excellent leadership and management have improved teaching further so that pupils' needs and current achievements are taken account of in every lesson.

Training has been clearly directed towards targeted areas and the British Sign Language Centre is already making a difference to mainstream staff and mainstream pupils' skills. The safety and well being of every child is paramount. The school's determination to

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ensure everyone has equal access and opportunities is tangible and underpins all of its work including its determination to 'narrow the gap' and improve pupils' achievement, including finding even more effective ways of detailing the achievements of those with the most complex needs. Governors are tenacious in advocating for the school and in pursuing policies that they know will strengthen its work such as the formal agreements with host schools. The specialist school funding and the school's resources have all been very carefully targeted to enhance provision and indeed they have, ensuring that value for money is excellent.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The school has reorganised its provision for the youngest children to meet the more complex range of needs of this group and those pupils in Year 1. This is working extremely well because of the joint expertise of the shared leadership and the learning support staff. Children make at least good progress in all areas of their learning and excellent progress overall. They are taught and cared for extremely well and make great strides in their learning very quickly, particularly in their language, communication and early literacy and numeracy, because of the excellent emphases here. The strong emphasis on personal and social development really prepares them well for later learning. The very interesting activities they do hold their attention for long periods so they are often remarkably attentive for their age and quick to contribute ideas. Even those with the most complex needs make small but highly significant gains in all areas of learning, because the excellent curriculum has been carefully thought through to help them do this. Good monitoring arrangements have been put in place to plot their

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learning journeys although some of this is still new. The attention to personal safety and children's well being is excellent and relationships with families are strong although rightly staff are considering how to strengthen links even more. Leadership of this area is strong, but relatively new and some aspects of their work such as 'small steps assessment' are still developing.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Boarding provision

The quality of boarding at Heathlands School is outstanding and meets all key National Minimum Standards. The provision for being healthy is outstanding. Staff are well trained and supported to ensure that pupils' individual needs are extremely well met. There are robust systems in place for the safe administration and storage of medication. Pupils' health needs are identified and good health is promoted. The school provides a very healthy, well balanced diet and is working towards a healthy schools award. Pupils are involved in menu planning and have facilities to make snacks and drinks. Meal times are a relaxed and sociable time for all.

Child protection and safeguarding are taken very seriously. All staff have been thoroughly vetted, in line with recommended recruitment procedures. Staff have been well trained in putting the safeguarding policies and procedures into practice. Comprehensive risk assessments for all aspects of safety of the premises, individual pupils and activities keep them safe and are well recorded and reviewed. Pupils are made aware of their rights and responsibilities which are well respected by the whole staff team. They say they feel safe and well cared for in the boarding house and that bullying rarely happens; if it does then staff quickly deal with it. Information and advice about how to complain is available for pupils in easy, accessible formats. Staff effectively manage any difficult situations and disagreements between pupils in a calm and professional manner. They receive training in managing challenging behaviour that is focused on positive interventions and practice so ensuring that restraints are not used and sanctions are few. The school's approach emphasises pupils' positive achievements and behaviours and this hugely supports their self esteem.

Helping pupils to enjoy their boarding experience and achieve their potential is judged to be outstanding. Excellent links with the teaching team ensure that pupils do very well both socially and academically. A homework club based at the secondary school enables older pupils to focus on improving and achieving their education targets. Younger pupils

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are well supported to reach their targets by staff in the boarding house study area. All are supported to do well in school and to develop their personal and social skills through individual targets which are regularly reviewed with them. The boarding house staff are very child centred in their work and practice. The focus on Every Child Matters is evident in their recording and practice. They work with pupils in a caring, positive and professional manner. Pupils say that staff are fair, fun and good to be with. They are clear that the staff support them and listen to them.

The provision for helping pupils make a positive contribution to their life in the boarding house is outstanding. Pupils are involved in many aspects of this including reviews of their care plans, house meetings and participation in the school newsletter which includes a section on boarding at Heath House. They are confident and positive. All staff are trained in British Sign Language and so are able to communicate with pupils very well. Pupils are also enabled to keep close contact with family and friends. There are clear policies and procedures for admission to and leaving the school, including boarding. Pupils are given information about the boarding experience and are encouraged to visit before boarding. Each pupil has an individual care plan that they are involved in producing and reviewing. They are encouraged and supported to be fully involved in decisions about their lives.

The provision for economic well-being is outstanding. Pupils live in a well designed, decorated and pleasant environment, which is very child friendly and that pupils say they enjoy living in. The staff office provides a pleasant work environment as well as space for parents and staff to meet. Pupils help choose the colours and fittings for their bedrooms and living areas. Resources are good, with lots of games, equipment and space to play, study and relax. Boarders have access to all the school's facilities, including specialist equipment to enable them to fully participate in communal living and to ensure their safety.

The organisation of this provision is outstanding. Pupils benefit from a well trained, competent staff team. Parents and pupils are provided with good information, in user friendly formats, about the way that the school operates and the services provided, including boarding. Staffing levels are good and ensure that the pupil needs are very well met. Staff receive regular supervision and annual performance reviews are now in place. The staff handbook of boarding practice ensures that care practice is consistent and fair. The school has effective internal monitoring processes, including a detailed development plan for the boarding provision.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The emphasis and practice on achieving and developing social inclusion is excellent. The head teacher and her staff team are excellent role models for the pupils in their care. Celebrations of different cultural festivals take place in the school and diversity is respected. The individual needs of the pupils, especially with regard to their diverse cultural and communication needs, are very well met.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

- There are no recommendations to report.

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This is the grade for the boarding provision

The effectiveness of the boarding provision	1
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Views of parents and carers

All parents who returned the questionnaire were happy with their child's experience at Heathlands, praising its work and their child's progress and in particular the way their children are being 'nurtured' and kept safe. A small number were concerned about how children are being supported to the next stage of their education or life or about their child's learning progress. Inspectors looked carefully at the evidence and found that the school's work with Connexions and the broader courses they offer prepare pupils effectively for their next steps, although they agreed with the school that they could link even more closely with parents to support these.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Heathlands School for the Deaf 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 29 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 96 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	13	45	15	52	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	13	45	16	55	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	41	17	59	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	41	15	52	2	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	16	55	13	45	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	12	41	14	48	2	7	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	38	15	52	3	10	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)	10	34	14	48	4	14	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	48	15	52	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	48	15	52	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	31	18	62	1	3	1	3
The school is led and managed effectively	10	34	18	62	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	16	55	13	45	0	0	0	0

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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



9 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Heathlands School, St Albans AL3 5AY

Thank you for being so helpful and friendly when we visited your school. We were very pleased to meet you, to be in your lessons and to hear your views.

We found Heathlands to be an excellent school in almost everything it does. The staff care for you very well indeed in all your different departments and after school. You told us you felt safe and that teaching is good. We agree that you are safe and we judge teaching as excellent. This means you all learn extremely well, although the school is always trying to help you to do even better. We liked all the different courses that you can now do at 'Heathlands at Townsend' and 'Heathlands at St Luke's' and the way in which you learn about different topics in the primary school and in the Early Years Foundation Stage. You told us that you really liked these too and were pleased that some of the mainstream teachers and children were learning to sign and about deafness. We were really pleased to hear from all of the schools the plans for more training for staff and how they had already started on this through the British Sign Language (BSL) Centre.

It was good to see how much you know about keeping healthy and how even the youngest children know how to stay safe. You all work hard in school we think you have really interesting things to do, including the clubs and different activities you do with the other pupils at Townsend and at St Luke's. It was great to hear about your drama work and how much the Townsend pupils are enjoying their British Sign Language classes.

Ms Davis and the staff all work hard to give you such an excellent education but we have just asked them to do one thing. You do lots of really good work with local schools and the community that helps you all to understand each other better. We would like the school to find more ways for you to get involved with different groups nationally and internationally, particularly those from other cultures and beliefs

I send all of you my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Susan Lewis

Lead Inspector

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