



Highfield School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 110940
LEA Cambridgeshire

Inspection number 278553
Inspection dates 29-30 September, 2005
Reporting inspector Sue Aldridge

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

Type of School	Special	School address	Downham Road
School category	Community special		Ely
Age range of pupils	2 - 19		Cambridgeshire
			CB6 1BD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01353 662085
Number on roll	90	Fax number	01353 662096
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Dr Joan Maurice-Smith
Date of previous inspection	25-29 September 2000	Headteacher	Mrs J Moran

Age group 2 - 19	Published October 2005	Reference no. 278553
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Highfield is a community special school that caters for pupils across the 2-19 age range. At present, there are 90 pupils at the school, all of whom have Statements of Special Educational Need or are undergoing assessment. Roughly a third of pupils have severe learning difficulties, almost a quarter are pupils with autism and smaller numbers have moderate learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or speech and communication difficulties. Most pupils are white; few are from minority ethnic groups. Families come from a variety of socio-economic circumstances. Very few children are in the care of the local authority. The school is located next to a high school which some older pupils attend so that they can follow examination courses. The school has links with other mainstream schools. Since the school was last inspected there has been a change of headteacher, and a trend toward admission of pupils with more pronounced difficulties. Children entering the school in the early years attain at levels well below those expected. Most of the pupils with moderate learning difficulties are of secondary age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Highfield is a good school. This is how the school sees itself. Parents are equally positive. Children in the Foundation Stage get a good start to their education. Pupils are proud of the school. They work hard and make good progress. Teaching is good, with some very good features. Teachers need to learn from one another to make the best practice a feature of all lessons. Although assessment is good, records are not always completed in a way that helps to demonstrate the school's success.

Because of the headteacher's very good leadership, it is truly a community school. It offers its services and expertise to others in the community and uses local resources well to support pupils' learning. Staff work successfully in partnership with parents and other agencies to bring together all the sources of help that pupils need. The school is well led and managed and provides good value for money.

Staff are committed and hard working, and have secured good improvement since the last inspection. All the issues from the last inspection have been acted upon and there has been much other development besides. There is a good capacity to improve further.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

To improve teaching and strengthen the school's self-evaluation, the staff should:

- Share the best practice in teaching and replicate this across the school,
- ensure that the samples of pupils' work in portfolios show the level of that work,
- make sure that comments on pupils' individual education plans show clearly whether targets have been achieved.

Achievement and standards

Although pupils across the school reach levels that are well below those expected, this is due entirely to the extent of their learning difficulties. Most pupils make good gains, and the school's assessment information, collected over the past three years, shows this clearly. Where pupils have not made the progress expected, the school is able to explain this convincingly. Good progress is linked to the good teaching that pupils receive and the positive attitudes of the pupils themselves. There is little scope for the school to compare itself with similar schools nationally, but staff from similar schools in the local education authority are starting to work together with this in mind.

Staff set challenging targets for pupils to achieve each term, and pupils achieve most of these. However, it is not always possible to tell, from what staff write at the end of each term, whether pupils have achieved every target. With clearer information, the school would be better placed to measure pupils' successes in this respect.

When pupils leave, either in Year 11 or at the end of their post 16 courses, all leave with nationally recognised certificates. For instance, in the summer of 2005, three Year 11 pupils left with GCSE passes in English and mathematics and three left with Certificates of Achievement in Drama. Several were successful in achieving accreditation in literacy, numeracy and key skills. Many were successful in achieving the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network's Bronze/Silver awards or Silver Challenge, and Accreditation for Life and Living certification. On leaving school, most pupils go on to continue their education. This summer, one left to take up employment.

Almost all parents are pleased with the progress their children make, and several indicated that they were delighted with this.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are good ambassadors for their school; they are polite and well mannered. They enjoy coming to school and their attendance is good. Their parents express pleasure at the way the school develops pupils' confidence and life skills. Behaviour is good; it is particularly good in lessons. Pupils are keen to learn, and to do well. Those that find it difficult to maintain high standards of behaviour show significant improvements whilst at the school. Pupils say that when there are disagreements, staff intervene to resolve disputes. Pupils who are at fault apologise.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their self-esteem is well developed by the school's positive atmosphere and the many opportunities for success to be recognised and celebrated. This results in confident pupils. Even in the playground, there are rewards for good behaviour, such as being helpful or refusing to be drawn into disputes. School rules are well known to pupils and they keep these well. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities. Even the youngest ones collect registers, and older pupils act as class monitors and work well in teams. For instance, they are currently preparing items for sale at the coffee morning they will host before Christmas. Good links with the community provide a wealth of opportunities for pupils to socialise with others. Pupils develop a good awareness of different cultures and customs.

The personal, social and health education curriculum supports well pupils' understanding of how to lead healthy and safe lifestyles. There are good opportunities for pupils to contribute to school life. Classes take turns to put on assemblies, and pupils' ideas were used in designing the sensory garden. One pupil described the garden as, 'A good place to chill out'. The health and well being of the pupils have a high priority in the school, and staff have embarked on the process leading to the Healthy Schools Award. Older pupils learn about life beyond school through work experience, careers and citizenship lessons. They steadily develop the basic skills and independence that they need for adult life.

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Teachers are highly skilled at planning work that is well matched to the pupils' abilities and ages. In doing so, they make good use of their excellent knowledge of the pupils and the assessment information that they have. They set challenging learning objectives, which they share with the pupils at the start of the lesson. In the best practice, there is regular and immediate feedback to pupils throughout the lesson, followed by a review of how well objectives have been met at the end. This helps pupils to see how well they have done and gives them pointers for improvement. For instance, in a French lesson, the teacher gave out cards for 'good thinking' or 'good listening' during the lesson. The cards had symbols and text on them which pupils could understand. At the end, the cards helped in reviewing pupils' learning, and merits were awarded on the basis of this.

Staff manage pupils well and have very constructive relationships with them. It is evident that staff respect and value pupils' contributions, and this makes pupils into confident learners who will 'have a go'. Teaching assistants work very well in partnership with teachers, both supporting pupils' learning, making timely and well judged interventions, and leading work in groups or with individual pupils.

Teachers make good use of suitable methods and resources. They are well supported in this by the staff who work in the resource base. Here, teachers' requests for items such as tailor-made resources for individual pupils, books, and home-made worksheets are all taken care of.

There is an emphasis on the use of sensory approaches for pupils with complex needs or visual impairment. Staff sign well and use symbols to support pupils' understanding; all rooms in the school have a clear box fixed to the door in which an object associated with the room's use is placed.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

The school provides a good range of learning experiences, which meets statutory requirements. Organisation of classes into groups of pupils with similar abilities or needs helps to ensure that individual needs are met well. The curriculum is well enriched with extra-curricular clubs, visits, visitors, and residential experiences. Links with other schools and colleges extend the range of experiences that the school can offer, and pupils from mainstream schools are welcomed to certain lessons.

There is a good number of well trained staff, and the accommodation enables experiences to be well matched to pupils' ages and learning difficulties. For instance, there are several specialist rooms as well as a sensory room and soft-play room; the oldest pupils have a common room where they can play pool or listen to music. The grounds are attractive and stimulating, and include separate play areas for children in the Foundation Stage. There are facilities outdoors for physical activities as well as relaxation and contemplation. Parents and the local community have helped to create a wonderful sensory garden in the grounds, by designing glass panels, donating plants and helping with the garden's construction. Resources are good. Information and communication technology (ICT) equipment has been improved significantly since the school was last inspected, and this has led to an improvement in the achievements of pupils.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

The school provides a safe environment for pupils. There are high standards of care, and pupils are well guided and supported. Rigorous checks are made in relation to health and safety matters, and child protection arrangements are good. Effective links with a wide range of agencies underpin much of the school's arrangements. As a result, pupils have access to therapists and services that they need. The high adult-to-pupil ratio means that staff have a thorough knowledge of pupils' needs, and they are responsive when needs change. Pupils say that there is always someone they can talk to and several staff have counselling skills.

There is good guidance for those approaching the transition from school to the next step in their lives, and good access to the advice and support of the Connexions service. All pupils are invited to their annual reviews, and an increasing number choose to attend. Many know what their individual targets are, and how close they are to achieving these. Pupils have a voice through the student council, and their views are taken seriously and acted upon.

One parent wrote, 'All the staff are totally committed to caring for her, supporting her and enabling her to learn.'

Grade: 2

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides very good leadership. In particular, she successfully promotes effective teamwork. She has put her personal stamp on the school in several important ways, and governors and staff share her vision for an extended school. Under her leadership, the school goes the extra mile to serve its local community. Last summer, for instance, governors funded a part-time caretaker so that therapists could use the school's premises for their clinics, and this was much appreciated by those that use the service. Parents feel that they are valued and listened to, supported and 'treated intelligently and compassionately'. Teachers have been relieved of some preparation by the introduction of the resource base. Teachers' well-being is promoted through a weekly Pilates session after school.

Staff are well supported in developing their professional and personal skills, and the school offers its expertise, in the form of an advanced skills teacher, to schools and other places where pupils learn, such as museums, in the area. This input is much appreciated, and helps to support inclusion locally.

Other key staff lead well in their areas of responsibility. The school formally recognises that subject leaders should be more closely involved in checking on the provision in their subjects and is about to embark on a programme of training in classroom observation.

Governance is good. Governors are very supportive and keep a check on the school's work through their committees. They are particularly successful in targeting resources to areas where development is planned, and they ensure that deadlines and statutory requirements are met.

School self-evaluation is well developed. A wide variety of people are involved in the process, and external validation helps the school to make secure judgements about its work.

The school's finances are well managed, and staff well deployed. The efficient administrative staff provide a warm welcome for visitors and play a key part in the smooth running of the school.

Grade: 2

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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	2

The quality of provision

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

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily.	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise.	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse.	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health.	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe.	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements.	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place.	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism.	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them.	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships.	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them.	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills.	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams.	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in Key Stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form.	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy.	Yes

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The School Council
Highfield School
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3 October, 2005

Dear Pupils,

Thank you all for making me feel welcome at Highfield, especially to those who showed me round or talked to me about school life.

I came to your school to find out what things you are all doing well, and whether there are any ways that you can improve.

The main things that you are doing well are:

- you work hard and enjoy coming to school so you make good progress,
- you behave well in lessons and around school,
- you get on well with one another and with the grown-ups in school,
- you become more responsible and independent as you get older.

The main things that people who work in your school are doing well are:

- your headteacher does a very good job, especially of making sure that lots of different people work together to help you,
- staff listen to parents and take seriously what they say,
- teaching is good and there are lots of interesting activities outside school time,
- staff take good care of you all; you feel safe and know that they will always help if you have a problem.

Highfield is a good school, but there are a few things to do to make it even better. These are:

- teachers should learn from one another about the best ways of teaching you,
- staff should make sure that work in your portfolios is properly marked,
- staff should make it clear whether you have reached the targets on your individual education plans.

Keep up the good work! I wish you all the best for the future,

Sue Aldridge, AI