

Ifield School

Cedar Avenue, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 5JT

Inspection dates

4–5 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Inspirational leadership by the headteacher, supported by senior and middle leaders, has created a clear vision for the future of the school, and improved learning and achievement in recent years.
- All pupils achieve exceptionally well throughout the school because staff know each one very well. Pupils make excellent progress from their starting points. They make significant gains in improving their reading, writing, communication and mathematics skills.
- The outstanding teaching is very successful in ensuring the overwhelming majority of pupils make excellent progress. Teaching targets support for the pupils' needs very effectively.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. This is because they are happy learners and feel safe, secure and valued by all staff. They have excellent attitudes towards their learning.
- Leadership and management are of a consistently high quality. The headteacher, together with senior and middle leaders, ensures that the performance of staff is evaluated rigorously and developed to ensure the best for the students.
- High-quality partnerships exist with other educational providers to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Children in the Reception class have an excellent start to their schooling because staff have high expectations of what they can achieve and their needs are met extremely well.
- In almost all lessons, the most able pupils are given activities that challenge their thinking and have opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects. Just occasionally, staff planning falls a little short of this expectation.
- The sixth form is excellent. Pupils have extensive opportunities to experience life outside school. These successfully help prepare them for their next steps in later life and learning.
- The experienced Chair and members of the governing body care deeply about the school. They provide a valuable level of challenge and support to leaders. They ensure that government funding for improving learners' basic skills is well spent for the benefit of all groups of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 17 lessons. All were observed jointly with senior leaders. Meetings were held with four members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body, the headteacher, and senior and middle leaders.
- Informal discussions were held with groups of learners from each key stage, and included hearing pupils read.
- There were 35 submissions to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors took account of the school's own surveys of parents and carers. Returns from 77 questionnaires completed by staff were also considered.
- Inspectors considered a range of evidence including the school's development plan and self-evaluation, monitoring reports, performance management records, policies on child protection and special educational needs, case studies, pupil premium records, the sports premium action plan, attendance records, governor reports, safeguarding information, school displays and records relating to behaviour and safety.

Inspection team

David Scott, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Maureen Coleman

Additional Inspector

Kate Robertson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ifield School is a special school for children and young people with profound, severe and complex needs. Almost half of all pupils have a diagnosis of autism, and speech and language difficulties; some have complex medical needs.
- Almost all pupils are admitted from nurseries and maintained schools from across the county. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The majority of pupils are from White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority heritages is just above average, and the proportion of the pupils who speak English as an additional language is just below average, with a few at the early stages of learning English. The majority of pupils are boys.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (those eligible for free school meals, those in care and those with a parent or carer in the armed services) is above average. Nine pupils are looked after by Kent or other local authorities and there are no pupils in the school who are from service families. All Year 7 pupils are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- A small proportion of pupils across the school are involved with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as a result of their behavioural needs.
- The sixth form is based at North West Kent College (URN 130725) and nursery-aged children attend The King's Farm Nursery (URN 118585), both being taught by Ifield staff. The college and the nursery are subject to separate inspection arrangements and their reports can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>.
- The school works with many different bodies and organisations, including the Gravesham Learning Partnership, Thamesview School, Hadlow College, and the Challenger Troop.
- In 2012, the local authority devolved the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (STLS) to 12 special schools in Kent, of which Ifield currently manages two districts. Since this time, Ifield staff have strengthened outreach services in partnership with other schools by providing specialist staff training and resources through SMILE (Supporting Multi-Professional Inclusive Learning and Education) based at the school, for 36 Gravesham schools. It also leads on research and development in the training of new teachers in partnership with two universities.
- The school does not enter pupils early for public examinations.
- The school is located on an attractive and spacious nine acre site. There is also a six acre managed woodland area off site that provides a stimulating outside classroom.
- The school was designated a National Support School in May 2013. The headteacher is a National Leader in Education (NLE) and one of the assistant headteachers is a Specialist Leader in Education (SLE).
- The senior leadership team responsibilities have recently been reconfigured, following the promotion of one its members.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that every lesson challenges the most able pupils to achieve the highest levels by providing more opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Pupils enter the school with skills which are well below the levels typical for their age. Learning of all groups is consistently good or better because teaching is outstanding.
- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and sixth form pupils make outstanding progress as a result of excellent relationships and very skilled staff, who model high expectations to pupils. For sixth formers, much of their learning takes place in environments and activities outside of the school, preparing them extremely well for their future lives.
- Staff are highly skilled in using alternative forms of communication and, as a result, pupils become more confident communicators. Sensory stimulation is used exceptionally well across the school to encourage pupils' response to learning. Well-rehearsed routines and the use of signs and symbols help pupils to understand what is expected of them. Extremely effective speech and language provision, together with music and the use of the sensory room, are key factors in enabling pupils to make rapid progress in their thinking skills.
- Pupils who are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding make outstanding progress, and the school ensures that the gap is narrowed between them and their peers. This is because of a robust training programme to improve pupils' literacy skills through one-to-one support. Their reading, writing and mathematics development is excellent and they are well supported through the school's effective use of extra support.
- Pupils with communication difficulties, including those on the autistic spectrum and those with severe learning difficulties, make huge strides in their communication skills and often make a leap forward in vocalising sounds and then using single words, as was observed when pupils used modern technology to stimulate discussion about the programming of and distance travelled by their computer controlled car. As a result of the teachers' and teaching assistants' perceptive questioning, pupils made great strides in their learning.
- There are no differences in the progress of different groups, including those of different ethnic backgrounds, those with severe learning difficulties and autism and those who speak English as an additional language. This is because senior leaders' excellent tracking and checking of each pupils' performance ensures equality of opportunity for all. For example, pupils who display a particular talent are taught in mainstream schools, which accelerate their progress and improves their social skills. Last year, one pupil gained an A* to C grade in GCSE mathematics as a result of this opportunity, and this year one pupil is studying GCSE art at the school.
- All students follow pathways appropriate to their learning needs, and in Year 11 and in the sixth form are able to achieve accreditation in English and mathematics as well as gaining life skills in managing the home, gardening, sport and leisure. The large majority stay on into the sixth form. By the end of Year 14, pupils are prepared as well as possible for the next phase of their lives after school. No one leaves without some form of accredited vocational qualification. Excellent partnerships with local colleges and employers support training and work experience very well.
- A third of pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5 spend part of their timetable studying off site. Their progress is excellent with all three providers. The arrangements for checking their work, attendance, punctuality and behaviour are highly effective.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The quality of teaching is consistently at least good and a high proportion is outstanding. Throughout the school, teachers are skilled at meeting the academic and personal needs of pupils and are focused on finding solutions to any barriers to learning that the pupils encounter. This has been as a result of well-considered training, together with rigorous and supportive monitoring and coaching by the senior team.
- In a very few lessons, the most able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently because they

are not given opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects.

- Classrooms are delightful, both indoors and outdoors, with imaginative activities and tactile displays to capture and respond to pupils' interests and enthusiasm. For example, the sensory room provides a secure indoor environment for quiet reflection together with an adjacent 'swing room' to further enhance physical development. High-quality resources, including a sensory garden, imaginative play areas and vegetable beds, provide numerous opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and to further enhance their learning journeys. Through its project, 'Ifield Life', the school provides residential experiences in its own lodge, located on the school site, where older pupils can experience life away from home and learn new life skills.
- Teaching is characterised by thorough planning, secure subject knowledge, high expectations, rigorous tracking, effective questioning and very good use of assessment to support learning. In the most effective lessons, pupils make rapid progress in their learning because they are given unusual opportunities to develop their basic skills. For example, a group of Key Stage 1 pupils thoroughly enjoyed handling leaves and twigs and exploring the environment of the school's woodland area. This stimulated them to discuss what they had seen and felt as well as describing the rather inclement weather.
- Teachers and well-briefed teaching assistants provide high levels of individual tuition and support where necessary to make sure each pupil learns confidently and successfully. As a result, pupils receive very good oral feedback on their work. In each lesson, the teacher speaks to individuals so they know how to improve their work through the next small step.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Excellent relationships are evident throughout the school. Pupils benefit from very high-quality interactions with adults and each other which help them to develop a positive self-image, confidence, communication and the skill to cope with changes in their lives.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around the site is excellent. They are polite, attentive and respectful to the staff and other pupils. Learning is allowed to flourish without interruption. Outside the classroom, through the many trips and visits and in the extensive work experience opportunities, pupils behave responsibly and maturely. For example, on a recent skiing trip, accompanied by staff and two governors, pupils won the Ambassadors for School Award, in recognition of their exemplary behaviour on the slopes.
- The school's records show an overall reduction of incidents for individual pupils and these are meticulously recorded. Bullying is extremely rare. The pupils make excellent progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding by: participating in theatre productions in partnership with mainstream schools; studying the commonwealth games; and displaying artwork in the school's art gallery. There are no recent recorded incidents of racist behaviour or derogatory comments about disability. An ethos of tolerance and positive support for others pervades the school. As a result of positive behaviour management strategies, fixed-term exclusions have reduced year-on-year to almost zero.
- The majority of pupils attend well. Their attendance is in line with mainstream secondary schools and is above other special schools. Most absence is linked with ill health, hospital appointments and the emotional and physical needs of pupils. Pupils are punctual to lessons and come into school each day with smiles and friendly greetings for staff and other pupils.
- Pupils are afforded many opportunities to take on posts of responsibility, including prefects in the sixth form, middle school stars in the main school, as well as being members of the school council and sports leaders. The house system promotes a sense of community and continuity through its adoption of the principles of an international organisation that champions pupils' rights and responsibilities.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is excellent. Rigorous safeguarding practices are in place and staff take the necessary steps to ensure pupils are safe. For example, doorways have been enlarged and new doors have recently been installed in order to accommodate pupils

in wheelchairs more safely. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe while using the internet through the teachers' promotion and demonstration of safe practices in the classroom.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The vision, passion, drive and determination by the highly effective and inspirational headteacher have been instrumental in developing the school to become outstanding. She, together with her senior and middle leaders, has continued to bring about sustained improvement since the previous inspection to realise the school's ambition to provide the best possible education for all pupils.
- A key ingredient to the school's success has been the training of staff to better meet the needs of the pupils. Through rigorous performance management procedures, the work of individuals is monitored with great care. Increases to teachers' salaries do not take place unless they have met their targets, linked to pupils' progress. As a result, there is a highly skilled and enthusiastic workforce. Teachers are in demand to advise and train other teachers within the local authority and beyond.
- The school is held in high regard by parents and carers who see the impact on their children; as one parent commented echoing the views of many, 'This school is exemplary; and better than outstanding.' The school is well known for developing future leaders of other schools.
- Staff are very positive. Teamwork and relationships are excellent. A high proportion of staff returned their inspection questionnaires. Almost all staff are proud to work at the school and appreciate the challenge, support and encouragement they are afforded so that they can develop their skills to the highest level, with many completing national leadership courses and master's degrees.
- The planning by senior staff for the use of the new funding to promote sport and fitness has been carefully targeted to expand opportunities in gymnastics and to buy-in specialist support to lead sessions with pupils and to train staff in coaching techniques related to new sports, such as kwik cricket and boccia.
- Senior leaders and the governors have ensured that all safeguarding procedures are securely in place, meet statutory requirements and are rigorously applied. They have also put in place rigorous procedures and protocols to monitor child protection arrangements regularly and robustly.
- The local authority knows the school well and offers a light-touch, but highly effective approach to continuing improvements in this outstanding school, recognising its impact on other educational establishments throughout the county through its outreach training programmes.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very proud of the school's provision and achievements and are deeply committed to making further improvements. They are very positive about all aspects of the school's work, particularly the leadership and management. Some governors are very experienced, but others are relatively new to the governing body or to their particular roles and therefore have more limited knowledge and skill. The highly experienced Chair of the Governing Body and members work closely with the headteacher to bring about improvements.
 - Governors receive training on many aspects of governance, including health and safety, child protection and financial management. As a result, they meet all their statutory duties, including those for safeguarding.
 - Each governor is linked to a different class or subject area. Through visits and interviews with staff, they are well informed about the quality of teaching. However, governors do not have a detailed enough understanding of the impact that teaching has on pupils' achievement because they do not systematically use information on pupils' progress to enable them to challenge and support senior leaders more rigorously.

- Governors are aware of the impact of the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding in raising pupils' achievement and improving their personal skills. However, they are less knowledgeable about how the school is using the sports premium funding to improve pupils' achievement in sport and physical education.
- Governors have ensured that there are good systems for rewarding staff, including overseeing the performance and salary of the headteacher. However, they are less aware of the impact that appraisal has on the performance of teachers and school improvement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	119040
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	432089

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	210
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	38
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Brotherston
Headteacher	Pam Jones
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 June 2011
Telephone number	01474 365485
Fax number	01474 569744
Email address	ifieldschool@aol.com

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