

Shepherds Down Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116642
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	312353
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	James Bowden

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Tricia Caffyn
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Sansome
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2003
School address	Shepherds Lane Compton Winchester SO21 2AJ
Telephone number	01962 713 445
Fax number	01962 713 453

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Shepherds Down has undergone reorganisation since the previous inspection. It now provides for learners with a wide range of complex special needs including moderate, severe and profound learning difficulties, language and communication disorders (including autism) and associated medical, social, physical and sensory difficulties. Many learners are supported by therapy, medical and children's services. A number with severe communication disorders exhibit challenging behaviour. All learners arrive at the school with a statement of special educational need, the kind of need varying from year to year. Currently, almost three quarters are boys. The great majority are of White British origin. Three have English as an additional language and are at an early stage of English language acquisition. Four are looked after by the local authority. The number entitled to free school meals is below the national average.

The school also has a satellite class of nine learners in Years 3, 4 and 5 at a primary school in Eastleigh. Shepherds Down also provides outreach support for learners in mainstream schools as well as extra provision for parental support, including courses.

The headteacher has only been in post since September.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides very effectively for all its learners and meets fully its aim of creating an ethos of achievement, enjoyment and fulfilment. It is a happy school and has significant strengths. A major strength is its multi-agency approach, which enhances considerably the quality of learners' well-being and progress. It also works closely with parents and carers, who are overwhelmingly appreciative of its work, as was shown by the many who returned the parental questionnaire sent out prior to the inspection. One commented, 'A wonderful school without which I really don't know what we'd do. Our son is thriving there and making great progress both in his learning and socially.'

Learners' personal development, including the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects, is outstanding. Some enthusiastically fed back their experiences of the wonders of nature to a whole school assembly after 'the bear hunt' in the school's own woodland area. In a recent survey, learners were very positive about the number of friends they have and how they enjoy playtimes. As a result of their attendance at the satellite class, those learners broaden their social experience and improve confidence and self-esteem through access to all the activities of this school. The outstanding curriculum matches the needs of learners very well and contributes considerably to their personal development. The National Curriculum is adapted really well to ensure learners are able to access as much as possible in relation to their needs and capabilities. The school also provides high quality care, guidance and support for learners and is highly successful in supporting each individual in very specific ways. All, including the most vulnerable, are extremely well looked after in a safe, healthy and caring environment. The dedication, enthusiasm and commitment of all staff in working with learners underpin this aspect of the school's provision.

Achievement is good by the time learners leave the school. Although standards overall are very low because of the extent of learners' complex special needs the progress they make is good. Some make especially good progress in communication skills, often using signs very well, and others improve their competencies in speaking and listening very well in a range of settings.

Teaching and learning are good and, as a result, learners make good progress. Teachers plan their lessons very well to ensure that the work is suitably pitched to challenge the range of capabilities in their classes, thus ensuring progress is made towards the targets set in learners' individual education plans (IEPs). Good quality information and communication technology (ICT) resources are used well to enliven learning, improve motivation and to improve communication skills. The more able learners are also enabled to improve their competencies in the use of ICT. Learners enjoy their lessons, one commenting, 'You learn new things every day.'

Leadership and management are good. There is a strong ethos that promotes learning, achievement, and high quality integrated care and education. There is robust monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. These ensure that achievement and high quality personal development are at the forefront of the school's work. Effective self-evaluation has enabled the school to clearly identify what developments are necessary to improve further. However, the school's analysis and use of the data it has on learners' progress is not sharp enough. The fresh focus of the newly appointed headteacher, her new staffing structure and new appointments have helped clarify what the school needs to do to improve even further. The governing body has been effective as a supportive and critical friend of the school, particularly

during the recent reorganisation. It has, however, not focused sufficiently enough on how well the school is doing in terms of the achievement and progress made by learners.

The school's continuing track record in ensuring learners achieve well, the improvements in issues identified at the previous inspection, the very effective leadership of the newly appointed headteacher and developments in provision since her appointment show there is good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

There is no distinct Foundation Stage provision. Because of the range of their special needs these learners are taught alongside Years 1 and 2. Provision is very carefully matched to each child's individual needs. Standards are well below those expected for their age. Nevertheless, learners make good progress, settling very well into the routine of school. They achieve their targets wherever they can and improve their personal, social and communication skills really well. Those whose behaviour can be potentially challenging respond well to the patient approach of teachers and other adults. For example, learning to take turns and making choices, such as which equipment to use in physical education activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen up the analysis and use of evaluation of learners' assessment data to judge the effectiveness of its provision and inform planning for future strategies.
- Ensure the governing body becomes more of an active and critical friend in order to ensure learners are making the best progress possible.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most learners operate at 'P' levels - levels that are well below standard National Curriculum levels in schools. However, they make good progress in their 'P' levels in relation to their starting points and are meeting the expected rate of progress for children with their particular needs. At the end of Year 6, learners achieve equally well in English, mathematics and science. Most make good progress towards the individual targets set for them at the annual review of their statement of special educational need. A few exceed their targets in elements of the subjects. The majority of learners also grow in confidence and independence and are willing to try to apply their physical and social skills in a range of settings.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

As a result of the exceptionally high level of individual support from all who work in the school, learners have positive attitudes to school. On arrival to school there are lots of smiling faces, friendly greetings and handshakes for those welcoming them. Attendance is very good and unauthorised absence is very low. Learners relish the opportunity to take part in physical activities, including swimming and other formal physical education lessons, and they eat healthily whilst at school. Though there is the occasional outburst from learners in lessons this is usually due to their frustration rather than anything untoward. Behaviour is very good in lessons. Learners move safely around the school and at playtimes play sensibly together. Older learners are very happy to help and support younger ones. Learners take an active part in the life of

the school, discussing and agreeing their class rules. They interact well in formal group activities such as 'circle time' and express their views through the school council. They are being well prepared for their future education because they are enabled to make choices, both verbally and non-verbally, are developing independence in their personal care and improving their social skills. In many activities, they are also developing well their use of ICT.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

When appropriate, learners are enabled to work on a one-to-one basis with an adult thus keeping them fully on task and enabling good progress. Positive working relationships between learners and staff underpin the quality of learning in lessons. Activities are made interesting, resources are used well, and effort and achievement are consistently rewarded. In a Year 6 lesson, learners used interactive technology confidently and competently when researching the uniforms of Roman centurions and painting and mosaic work in Roman buildings. This encouraged their enthusiasm for learning and their aspirations to make progress. Teachers' use of oral praise and encouragement is very effective in lessons and helps motivate learners further. Teaching assistants (TAs) work very well alongside teachers and provide valuable support, particularly in monitoring the progress learners make.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The breadth of the curriculum, including a wealth of enrichment activities both on-site and off-site, supports learners' physical, social and communication development particularly well. These include competitive sporting activities and 'creative' experiences. The school's outstanding grounds and on-site facilities, including a hydrotherapy pool, secure play spaces and other specialist rooms to develop early skills, contribute significantly to the progress learners make. The recently built boardwalk through the woodland area provides numerous opportunities for all learners to explore and appreciate the sensory sculptures and other aspects of the natural world. There are visits off-site that enable learners to improve and develop their functional independence in terms of literacy and numeracy, including visits to supermarkets where they are enabled to 'manage' money.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The wide range of support and guidance offered by the school results in learners who are happy to attend and behave well, and who develop in confidence and independence as they progress through the school. Close working relationships with a wide range of specialist agencies and other schools contribute extensively to this. The school is particularly diligent in ensuring minimal unauthorised absence. There is also excellent quality support for parents and carers, including support groups and specific courses, both during the day and after school. This is much appreciated. Learners' personal development is closely tracked, as is their individual performance in relation to 'P' levels at both the school and the satellite class. This enables teachers to plan individualised programmes to meet learners' precise needs thus enabling all to make successful transition to the next stage of their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The newly appointed headteacher and her staff have a clear focus on improving achievement and raising standards. There is a whole-school commitment to ensure that every learner really matters, which ensures that every individual makes the best use of their time and effort whilst attending the school. As a result, all learners make good progress. Although the school has much data on individual learners, the analysis and use of this data is underdeveloped. Leaders are not using it rigorously enough to judge the effectiveness of provision and inform planning for future strategies. Since the previous inspection, the governing body has been effective as a supportive and critical friend of the school. Particularly impressive has been the way governors manage financial resources, most notably during the recent reorganisation. However, governors have not focused enough on checking how well the school evaluates its effectiveness to ensure learners achieve to the best of their capabilities.

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Annex A

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, 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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Shepherds Down Special School, Winchester, SO21 2AJ

I recently spent two days at your school and visited some of you in lessons both at Shepherds Down and at Magpie's class at Crescent school in Eastleigh. I also chatted to many of you as individuals as well as to a small group of older pupils. Thank you all for being ever so friendly and making me feel really welcome. I was particularly impressed with your positive attitudes to school and how happy you are being there. You all receive a good quality education. This is because:

- your new headteacher and her senior team lead and manage the school very well
- your personal development is outstanding, which prepares you really well for the next stage of your education
- teaching is good, which means you all make good progress towards your personal targets
- the excellent curriculum and other activities during the day make your education very interesting
- all adults who work with you make sure you are safe and extremely well cared for
- they are very dedicated, have your best interests at heart and want to make sure you do well in the future.

To make things even better the school should:

- use assessment data about you as individuals in a better way
- work with governing body to make sure it checks that you are making the best progress you can.

Best wishes,

James Bowden

Lead inspector