

The Ifield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119040
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313167
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Farrell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	139
6th form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Read
Headteacher	Pam Jones
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2004
School address	Cedar Avenue Gravesend DA12 5JT
Telephone number	01474 365485
Fax number	01474 569744

Age group	4–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

In September 2004, Ifield School was redesignated from providing mainly for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. It now educates pupils with a very wide range of special educational needs. It began providing for pupils over the age of 16 in September 2006. From January 2007, the school has formal shared provision for early years provision in an adjacent primary school. It was designated as a specialist school in communication and interaction in September 2007.

When pupils enter the school, their attainments are well below average because of their special educational needs. There are three times as many boys as girls. Over 20% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and around 6% of pupils are looked after by the local authority.

A very substantial building programme has taken place at the school over the previous two years. With this all but completed, the school now enjoys the benefits of a new building. Ifield has a main school site, sixth form provision in North West Kent College three miles away, and 'The Woodland' (a natural habitat), also several miles away. The school includes a supporting multi-professional education (SMILE) resource centre.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Ifield is a good school where pupils of all ages progress well. It has outstanding features. The school has excellent partnership arrangements with other agencies, schools, businesses and others which considerably enhance the provision. Parents are deeply appreciative of all the school provides, saying, 'Every day I feel lucky my child has a place at Ifield' and 'Staff are an asset to the school, always putting the children first'. The school's excellent care and support enable pupils to make outstanding personal development. They feel safe and understand the importance of staying healthy. Their enjoyment of school is clear in their excellent behaviour, good attendance and their keen participation in all the school offers. Good economic understanding and skills are underpinned by good progress and provision for basic skills and by the very well developed work experience opportunities for older pupils. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and put a great deal into the wider community.

Good teaching in the well led and managed Foundation Stage ensures that children make a good start in their learning and development. Good progress and achievement are continued throughout the main school and into the sixth form because of the good teaching pupils receive. Consequently, older pupils in the school, and in the sixth form if they stay on, achieve well in a range of examination courses. Pupils are set, and reach, challenging targets because the school supports their efforts well.

Good teaching is characterised by a rich variety of interesting activities. Pupils enjoy their lessons, try very hard and have the confidence to ask questions when they do not understand. The pace of some lessons though is not always brisk enough. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution, including to pupils' personal development. However, teachers do not always deploy teaching assistants well enough when they are talking or demonstrating something to the class. This leads to pupils making slower progress in this part of the lesson. The team of speech and language therapists and others make a very valuable contribution to the development of communication skills. Ifield's excellent curriculum underpins the wide variety of activities on offer and it is enriched by activities provided in 'The Woodland' site. The curriculum ensures that pupils leave school well prepared for the next phase of their education or employment. In the sixth form, too, the excellent curriculum prepares pupils extremely well for the future. The good leadership and management in the school at all levels have enabled Ifield to deal with major changes. It has successfully handled a major two-year building programme which has at times placed great pressure on available space. At the same time, it has developed its specialist status to meet the needs of pupils with different types of special educational needs and a wider age range. The remarkable adaptability of the school during this period has been due to the excellent sense of direction senior staff have created and the outstanding commitment to the school by staff and governors. This, together with its clear ability to successfully deal with major challenges, gives it an outstanding capacity to improve.

The school has good systems for self-evaluation and knows itself well, including its monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. It has several good systems for helping it determine how well pupils are progressing. However, where , this is less secure, the school recognises the need to reassess the criteria by which it judges the different rates of progress made by some pupils.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students make good progress and achieve well in the sixth form, leaving with a suitable range of examinations. They take up foundation courses at the local college, or go on to employment. Students achieve challenging targets, including those for independent living, community skills and preparation for work. Good teaching gives students many opportunities to discuss matters, work as a team, and evaluate their own work. Lessons are well organised so that they provide varied and challenging activities.

The outstanding personal development and behaviour of students is encouraged by their excellent relationships with staff and each other. They feel very safe because staff are very conscious of health and safety, helping give students a very strong understanding of risks. Students' self-esteem is very high because staff provide excellent care and know the students and their families very well. Clear, individual learning plans and regular reviews ensure that students' progress is very well monitored. The excellent curriculum, including work experience, sports, visits, environmental studies and opportunities to develop independence, prepares students exceptionally well for the future. Effective leadership and management ensure that the sixth form is very adaptable to the needs of different students.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage is very well led and managed. The provision includes the innovation of shared staffing and financial support for the education and assessment of children with special educational needs on the roll of an adjacent primary school. Children make good progress and achieve well throughout this stage because of the good and well planned teaching. Children's progress is appreciatively recognised by parents, one remarking that their child 'has come on in leaps and bounds'. The good teaching includes the successful encouragement of the use of symbols and signing to support speech. Children learn to listen, look and participate, securing the basis for further learning. Occasionally, the pace of lessons is not always brisk and progress is slower than it could be. The excellent curriculum, placing a high priority on personal development, provides a rich variety of activities, which engage children very well. Personal development is excellent as children quickly learn routines and respond very well to rewards and high expectations. A good lesson observed in the new sensory room enabled children to explore the stimulating environment and gain confidence as they did so. The outstanding care and support of children include very careful monitoring of their progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning by increasing the pace of lessons and ensuring teaching assistants are fully deployed during whole-class teaching periods.
- Refine systems to ensure the school does not over estimate the progress of some pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils, supported by good teaching, make good progress right through the school from the Foundation Stage to the end of formal schooling. Pupils make good progress in literacy,

numeracy and information and communication technology, which contributes to the good progress they make in developing work-related skills. Boy and girls, pupils with different types of special educational needs and other groups all make good progress. Some individual pupils make exceptional progress, in mobility, for example, which reflects the school's very close partnership with staff from other agencies. Older pupils in the school and in the sixth form gain a suitable range of examinations including GCSEs, entry level qualifications and, more recently, from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils feel very safe indeed because the school takes great pains with its systems to support their health and safety and staff create an environment in which safety is taken very seriously. Pupils eat healthily, keep themselves fit and practise very good hygiene. They greatly enjoy school, and this is reflected in their good attendance and their excellent behaviour in lessons, around the school, and when off the school site. Pupils care for each other and help one another when they can, and the school recognises this very well by awarding 'kindness points'. They have excellent relationships with adults in the school, in whom they place great trust. Their good development of economic skills and understanding is supported by the good progress they make in basic skills such as literacy and by the opportunities such as work experience. Pupils contribute to the community exceptionally well, both in their care for each other, in the school community, and in what they do locally. For example, pupils put on local performances of plays and music and older pupils participate in a citizenship programme allowing them to volunteer to help others in their own time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is well matched to pupils' individual needs and they are enthusiastic learners. The work is well pitched to the level of the pupils and they engage very well in the activities. Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent and among pupils themselves as reflected in pupils' excellent behaviour in lessons. Staff know the pupils and their needs very well indeed and this contributes to pupils' exceptional personal development. Lesson plans are clear and manageable, interesting activities are supported by the excellent curriculum, and interactive whiteboards are very well used to enliven lessons. Teaching assistants make a valued and valuable contribution to the excellent relationships that have been built and to the care of pupils. However, teachers do not always deploy teaching assistants as well as they should in the parts of lessons where the teacher is talking to the whole class or demonstrating something to them. On occasions, the pace of lessons is not always brisk enough. These features slow the progress that pupils make in these lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The excellent curriculum provides an outstanding range of experiences which support learning very well indeed. It is very closely matched to the pupils' needs. The curriculum continues to be refined, to respond to the changing needs of the pupils that the school is now educating. It makes a crucial contribution to pupils' excellent personal progress through its provision for physical, social and other activities that promote confidence and raise self-esteem. The very wide range of physical activities lead to pupils' excellent understanding of staying healthy. Very good opportunities for work experience are used fully to prepare pupils for future challenges. A range of accredited examinations provide entirely appropriate opportunities for pupils to show what they can achieve. These are being further developed appropriately, as the school continues to respond to the changing needs of its pupils. Excellent facilities in 'The Woodland' are very well used for exploring the environment, participating in a fitness trail and for drama and other activities. The wide range of after school clubs are greatly appreciated and enjoyed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The excellent personal development and sense of well-being of pupils reflect the exceptionally high quality of commitment and care of staff. This is greatly appreciated by parents. One said, 'Ifield has given my son back his self-esteem', while another observed that staff 'always put the children first'. Parents feel well informed and able to ask for advice if necessary. The exemplary systems for keeping pupils safe include very early identification of vulnerable children. For example, excellent links with neighbouring schools enable Ifield to assess very young children with special educational needs before they transfer to Ifield.

The school has outstanding links with other services, schools, agencies and businesses, all harnessed to improve provision for pupils. These partners value the school as highly as it values them. The school's speech and language therapists and others contribute extremely well to the support of pupils, for example in developing feeding procedures and encouraging and supporting communication skills. Pupils' independence is extremely well encouraged because the level of challenge set for them matches very well what they can do. Academic guidance is very strong, with pupils having appropriate targets and individual learning plans linked to systems that track pupils' progress effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are outstanding in setting a clear vision and direction for the school and this has been crucial during the changes over recent years. Senior leaders are clear about what the school needs to do to improve and take swift action to address weaknesses. The governors are fiercely proud of the school and exceptionally rigorous in the support and

challenge they provide. These two factors have enabled the school to deal extremely well with the building project when at times as much as half of the school area was unavailable for use. It has also enabled them to respond well to the changes in pupils' special educational needs. This resilience and flexibility constitute a remarkable achievement and reflect the good progress the school has made since its last inspection. Challenging targets set by the school are effectively used. Equal opportunities are effectively promoted and discrimination is tackled strongly and effectively. Physical resources are very well deployed. The well managed SMILE facility provides a valuable resource in supporting other schools. The school's effective self-evaluation processes include consulting and responding to the views of parents and pupils very well and its observations and judgements of the quality of teaching and learning are precise. The school gathers a very good range of data about pupils' progress but senior leaders recognise the need to ensure that they develop more accurate criteria for judging overall the progress of pupils.

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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	16-19
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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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	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	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

23 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ifield School, Gravesend DA12 5JT

Thank you very much for helping me and my colleague when we inspected your school recently.

We found many things to praise. You develop extremely well personally and the school cares for you and supports you excellently. The excellent curriculum gives you a very wide range of valuable activities. Ifield works extremely well with others to make sure you get the very best. The school is very well led and managed, teaching is good and the provision for very young children and for students in the sixth form is also good.

There are two things the school could do even better. I have asked the staff to:

- Ensure teachers organise teaching assistants better when the teacher is working with the whole class.
- Make sure they do not over estimate the progress that some pupils are making

Yours sincerely

Michael Farrell Lead inspector