

Highfield Special School

Downham Road, Ely, CB6 1BD

Inspection dates 8–9 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and there has been significant improvement in teaching and pupils' achievement since the previous inspection.
- Other leaders and managers make a good contribution to school improvement. The governing body is now closely involved in the school's work.
- Teaching is good, with an increasing amount that is outstanding. The teaching of English and mathematics is strong throughout the school.
- Most pupils make at least the amount of progress that is expected nationally and there has been an increase in the proportion who make outstanding progress. More-able pupils do exceptionally well.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Pupils enjoy learning and apply themselves exceptionally well. They feel very safe in school and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- The school has very effective systems for assessing pupils' needs. It uses the resulting information carefully to match learning opportunities to the next steps in their development.
- Partnership with parents and other agencies is excellent. Those parents who expressed their views about the school are delighted with the way it meets their children's needs.
- The early years is outstanding and gives children a very positive start.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The teaching of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties is not as good as teaching in the rest of the school.
- The school does not have a teacher with specialist knowledge of profound and multiple learning difficulties to lead this aspect of its work.
- The sixth form is good. Although learning opportunities for students in the sixth form have improved, they are not yet outstanding. The school does not link learning in the sixth form closely enough to real life and the world of work.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited all the classes as well as seeing a communication session and a dance session for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This enabled inspectors to see the teaching of all the different types of learning difficulties within the school. Of classes visited, a small number were seen jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team and with a group of pupils. The lead inspector met with the Chair and Chair of the Personnel Committee, and held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspection team considered the 18 responses to the online survey (Parent View) and looked at parents' comments in their children's home-school books.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including records of pupils' progress, and planning for individual pupils' learning and for managing their behaviour. They sampled pupils' work, and looked at records of leaders' checks on teaching and at documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lynne Thorogood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a school for pupils with moderate, severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, and behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. An increasing number of pupils in the younger classes have complex needs. Pupils all have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is broadly average at just over a quarter. (This is government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority).
- The school provides an outreach service to local mainstream schools for pupils with learning difficulties. A teacher spends on average one day a week providing this service.
- Some students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form spend part of their time in Ely College and Cambridge Regional College. Younger pupils spend time on occasion in The Lantern Community Primary School.
- The school is working with the local authority to develop its accommodation. In September 2015, it is due to have a substantial extension to its building ready for use.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching and learning of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties by:
 - making sure that this aspect of the school’s work is led by a member of staff who has had specialist training in profound and multiple learning difficulties
 - providing further training for other staff in the teaching and learning of pupils with the most profound and complex needs
 - making sure that teachers use their teaching assistants to best effect in lessons to support these pupils’ development
 - focusing ongoing checks on teachers’ work on the impact it has on these pupils’ progress.
- Raise the achievement of students in the sixth form by:
 - extending opportunities for them to learn through activities linked to real life and the world of work
 - deepening the way the project at Anglesey Abbey is used to promote students’ individual learning
 - drawing on examples of best practice in other schools to make the curriculum more innovative and to overcome the current lack of space on the school site.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is driven in his quest for excellence. He has brought about a lot of positive change since the previous inspection and the school is strongly placed to improve further. The headteacher's high expectations have created a culture where teaching can flourish and where pupils are expected to behave well.
- Other staff with leadership responsibilities make a good contribution to the school's effectiveness. They fulfil their roles efficiently and are highly committed to meeting pupils' individual needs. Key stage and subject leaders take an active part in identifying what is working well and what could be improved. The outreach service is led and managed well and is valued by mainstream schools.
- The leadership of teaching is strong. Over the last three years, senior leaders have been successful in bringing about systematic improvement in the quality of teaching so that there is now an increasing amount that is outstanding. They have been rigorous in tackling teaching that required improvement, and systems for checking teachers' work are thorough and effective. Just occasionally, leaders' checks on teaching do not focus enough on the impact it has on the progress of all the pupils in a class.
- There has been a substantial amount of training to develop the staff's skills and teachers have plenty of opportunity to observe one another's teaching in order to spread best practice. Training has been particularly effective in developing the staff's skills in teaching reading and writing, using special equipment for teaching mathematics, and supporting pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.
- Leaders regularly discuss each pupil's development with their class teacher and with therapists to identify where improvements could be made. The school is then quick to put in place extra support where pupils need it and to set up new programmes for those who would benefit from them.
- Assessment focuses very much on the progress pupils make against their individual learning targets, which are broken into small steps. The school has begun to consider how it will respond to the removal of National Curriculum levels, although many of its pupils are working at P levels (performance scales for those with special educational needs who are working below National Curriculum levels.)
- The curriculum has improved significantly since the previous inspection and the school provides an increasing range of learning opportunities for pupils. It has improved the qualifications open to older students, including access to GCSE and a diploma course at Ely College. Close links with Cambridge Regional College and The Lantern Community Primary School further extend pupils' learning opportunities. Strong emphasis is placed on the teaching of literacy and numeracy throughout the school. Excellent attention to developing pupils' personal skills contributes greatly to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school is using its primary school sport funding effectively. It has used this money to purchase a trampoline and to pay for two sessions a week led by a trampoline coach. This has provided a number of benefits to pupils, enhancing their physical well-being and reducing anxiety and challenging behaviour for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.
- Partnership with parents and other agencies is outstanding. Parents who expressed their views about the school were full of praise for its work, commenting on how flexibly their children's needs are met. The family worker provides outstanding support and advice for parents and families, and the school does all that it can to enable parents to support their children's learning at home.
- Improving provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. The school has improved the curriculum for these pupils and increased its level of resources to support their communication. For instance, it has developed the use of switches and introduced new technology to assist pupils in making choices.
- However, the school does not have a member of staff with specialist knowledge in profound and multiple

learning difficulties to lead this aspect of its work. Despite training for staff in how to support pupils with the most complex difficulties, the staff are not as skilled in this area as they are in working with other groups.

- The local authority gives valuable support to senior leaders by providing a breakdown of data and supporting with the performance management of the headteacher. It has also provided training for staff at the school's request.

■ The governance of the school:

- Since the previous inspection, there have been some changes in the membership of the governing body and there has been a marked improvement in governors' effectiveness and their involvement in the school's work. Governors interviewed during the inspection were very well informed about performance data and the quality of teaching. They could provide clear examples of how the governing body challenges senior leaders.
- Through their visits to the school, governors collect information for themselves to support their decision making. They meet with leaders who have responsibility for English, mathematics and science and other key areas, and work with them to plan future developments.
- Members of the governing body make sure that the school is financially stable and check that pupil premium funding is spent effectively to support the progress of the pupils for whom it is intended. As a result, these pupils make progress that is consistently at least good and in line with that of their peers.
- The governing body is kept well informed about the management of teachers' performance and makes sure that the best teachers are rewarded financially for their work.
- Governors have a clear understanding of how the school promotes tolerance and, in so doing, prepares pupils for life in modern Britain.
- Governors meet their statutory duties and make sure that the school has highly effective systems for safeguarding its pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. The school emphasises the importance of self-discipline and pupils are extremely well behaved and focused in lessons. Throughout the school, pupils' excellent attitudes to learning contribute a great deal to their academic progress and personal development.
- The school has outstanding systems for managing pupils' behaviour and for supporting those pupils whose difficulties include challenging behaviour. The staff are consistent in applying pupils' individual behaviour plans, and these are discussed and agreed with parents.
- Very effective systems are in place to introduce pupils who transfer from other schools so that they settle in quickly. Pupils who join the school with a history of behavioural concerns make outstanding progress in their behaviour, and Highfield has a track record of successfully meeting the needs of pupils who have been excluded from other special schools.
- The attendance rate is above that of special schools nationally partly because the school works closely with parents to promote regular attendance. It is also because pupils enjoy school so much. One pupil's parents described how their son is 'so happy to go to school that he waits at the front door for his taxi, jumping and smiling'.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The staff provide high quality care for pupils and do all that they can to keep them safe. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school and always have someone they can ask if they need reassurance.
- Older pupils and those who are more able know about the importance of staying safe, for instance, when using computers, crossing the road or in their dealings with strangers. All the pupils have trusting

relationships with the adults who work with them.

- Pupils know what bullying is and say that it rarely happens in school. This is confirmed by the school's own records and parental comments. Staff treat pupils with a high level of respect and pupils, in turn, treat one another with care and consideration. Relationships are excellent throughout the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Leaders' own checks on the quality of teaching show that it is nearly always at least good and an increasing amount is outstanding.
- Throughout the school, teachers communicate high expectations to pupils and promote in them an excellent attitude to learning. This ensures that pupils have a belief in themselves as learners and develop the necessary personal skills to succeed.
- Teachers have a thorough understanding of pupils' individual difficulties and work closely with speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists to identify how best to meet pupils' needs.
- Teachers nearly always use information about pupils' needs to plan lessons that provide the right level of challenge and they always explain to them what they are expected to learn. Teachers and teaching assistants are readily available to help pupils who need it, and the staff provide a great deal of encouragement and clear feedback about how well pupils have done.
- Pupils have plenty of opportunity in lessons to develop their communication skills and the school has improved the way it uses technological aids, pictures and symbols to assist pupils' communication and understanding. Where necessary, these methods are supplemented by signing. Teachers usually question pupils well. Very occasionally, they do not probe the thinking of more-able pupils as much as they could to promote their speaking and listening, but these pupils are generally challenged very well.
- Teachers ensure that pupils have excellent opportunities to develop their reading skills. They provide daily opportunities for them to read and to practise their reading in other subjects. Staff make very good use of interactive whiteboards and practical equipment to help pupils in mathematics lessons. Equally, they set tasks and use methods that motivate and engage pupils' interest in writing.
- Since the previous inspection, the staff have come some way in increasing their knowledge about how to work with pupils with the most complex needs. However, teachers do not always organise activities to best effect for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties or use their teaching assistants as fully as they could to support these pupils. As a result, they sometimes have to wait a considerable time for activities to start or receive no stimulation while the teacher interacts with the rest of the class one at a time. Occasionally, when they are in classes with more-able pupils, some activities are not matched as closely as they should be to the next steps for pupils with the most complex needs and this slows their progress.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most pupils make at least the amount of progress expected nationally and an increasing percentage make outstanding progress. Overall rates of progress show an upward trend over the past three years, with gaps in achievement between groups of pupils narrowing.
- Pupils who transfer from mainstream schools or from other special schools quickly develop positive learning skills and make good or better progress. This includes pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.
- Pupils with moderate learning difficulties and some with autistic spectrum disorders are among the more-able pupils in the school. Many of these pupils make excellent progress in English, mathematics and

science.

- More-able pupils learn to form their letters accurately and are able to write a series of sentences. Some make correct use of capital letters and full stops, while others express themselves by combining pictures and text or symbols. During the inspection, students at Key Stage 4 showed that they knew how to set out a letter. Their books included examples where they had used word processing to present their work and learnt the difference between instructive and persuasive writing.
- In mathematics, pupils make most progress in finding out how to count and to recognise and add or subtract using money. Older and more-able students are able to work out how much change they would need if they were shopping, do calculations with larger numbers and learn about different measures.
- Throughout the school, pupils do extremely well with their reading because there is a consistent approach to teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make) and pupils read frequently. Those at Key Stages 1 to 3 who need extra help with their reading take part in support groups three times a week, and this has a very positive effect on their progress.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage settle in quickly and make outstanding progress. They do particularly well in communication and language and in their personal, social and emotional development.
- The achievement of students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form has improved since the previous inspection. Students who leave at the end of Year 11 do so having gained a range of qualifications, mostly at Entry Levels 1 to 3.
- In some years, more-able pupils gain one or two GCSE passes and students who study the BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) course in construction at Ely College meet with a good level of success. The time students spend at other settings makes a positive contribution to their achievement and greatly increases their confidence.
- When they leave school, students all go on to placements that have been carefully chosen to reflect their needs and interests, which in most cases means moving on to further education.
- The progress of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is consistently good or better. These pupils make at least as much progress as their classmates in English and mathematics. This is because the school uses the funding carefully to meet their individual needs.
- A very small minority of pupils do not make the expected amount of progress in some subjects. The school keeps a close check on this and where pupils could be doing better – for example, a few pupils with complex needs – it puts plans in place to raise their achievement.
- Inspection findings show that different groups of pupils usually make good or better progress in lessons. However, at times, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with the most complex needs do not make as much progress as they could.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- Leadership and management of the school's early years provision are outstanding, and there has been a lot of positive change since the previous inspection.
- Very thorough systems are in place for assessing what children can do when they join the school and for tracking their progress. Close work with other agencies and with any previous setting mean that children's needs are identified as precisely as possible. Staff regularly observe and record information about children's development and use this to match activities closely to the next stage in their learning.
- Outstanding teaching makes use of a variety of resources that appeal to children's different senses and this helps to bring learning to life. Children have excellent opportunities to discover by exploring materials

and the staff provide just the right amount of support and challenge. They make very good use of the outdoor area to extend children's learning experiences, and of pictures and symbols to support the development of their understanding and communication skills.

- There were too few children on roll in the Early Years Foundation Stage during the inspection to report details about their attainment and progress without identifying individuals. However, past records show that achievement is outstanding, especially in communication and language and personal, social and emotional development. The school promotes children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well. Children's behaviour is outstanding and the school has exceptionally good systems in place to make sure they are kept safe.
- Partnership with parents is excellent. The early years leader provides workshops for parents and staff regularly share information with them about their children's learning.

The sixth form provision is good

- The sixth form is led and managed well, and there has been good improvement in this area of the school's work since the previous inspection.
- The sixth form caters for a small number of students at present, partly because the school encourages those who are ready to move on at the end of Year 11 to transfer to college. The small size of the sixth form is also partly determined by lack of space, which places restrictions on the range of learning experiences the school is able to provide.
- The school goes some way to overcoming lack of space by most students spending a morning a week for one term each year at Cambridge Regional College and taking part in work-related learning at Anglesey Abbey for one day a week for one term a year. There are some other opportunities for students to gain experience of the world of work and to link their learning to real life through one-day tasters with local firms, but opportunities for work-related learning are not as well developed as they could be. Furthermore, staff do not plan the Anglesey Abbey experience as well they could to get the most out of it for students' development.
- Nevertheless, students make good progress overall and are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. They receive good advice on their future options and often make excellent progress in lessons, especially in English and mathematics. This is because teachers match activities extremely well to their learning needs and provide exactly the right amount of challenge. There has been an improvement in the range of nationally recognised qualifications offered and these reflect students' needs well.
- The behaviour and attitudes of students in the sixth form are outstanding. They are highly motivated and apply themselves extremely well. Rigorous systems ensure that they are kept safe.

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	110940
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	448006

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	105
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	7
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Esther Harris
Headteacher	Simon Bainbridge
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2012
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