

# White Spire Special School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110575
<b>Local Authority</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Inspection number</b>	356773
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 June 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ronald Hall

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	126
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	21
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Marlene Harrison-Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Maria Penicud
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 November 2007
<b>School address</b>	Rickley Lane Bletchley Milton Keynes MK3 6EW
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<b>Age group</b>	7–19
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	9–10 June 2011
<b>Inspection number</b>	365773

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by 2 additional inspectors who visited 14 lessons and observed 12 teachers. They also observed break and lunchtime activities, held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, senior local authority officials, pupils and staff. The inspectors looked at plans and policies, assessment, recording and tracking systems and school incident and log books. In addition, questionnaires completed by 24 parents and carers, 78 pupils and 16 staff were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The quality of training for staff in relation to behaviour management and what effect this has had on behaviour throughout the school.
- The consistency with which the leadership team and all staff use school data to effectively set challenging targets and inform planning.
- Whether the school has raised the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection.

## Information about the school

This is a larger-than-average special school which includes sixth form provision. The school also provides before- and after-school provision. Most pupils have moderate to severe learning difficulties and some have highly complex needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There is a growing number within the school who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The vast majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds; a small number are of Asian, Asian British or Black British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. There are significantly more boys than girls. The school has gained a number of awards including the Golden Wonder Community Award for its work with the charity Help the Aged.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

White Spire is a good school which has gained the confidence of parents and carers in how it cares for, educates and prepares their children for the future. Before- and after-school provision supports pupils' learning well, providing a good start to the day and guidance at the end of the day. The outstanding provision made for pupils' care, support and guidance draws together very effectively the input of parents and carers, the school and many agencies in the community to ensure pupils have their needs met. Leaders and managers ensure that the needs of pupils and their families are given priority, as well as providing the drive for continuous improvement and a good capacity for sustained improvement. Senior leaders' effectiveness is based on rigorous and accurate self-evaluation procedures. Subject leaders also make good use of monitoring and assessment to improve provision, through their self-evaluation processes.

Well-developed partnerships have been crucial to much of the school's success and are outstanding. Engagement with parents and carers is good and the school enjoys their increasing support and helps them in many ways to gain the assistance they need to aid their children at home. The school is very well resourced, which enables it to maintain close oversight of pupils' needs and conditions and to manage these very effectively. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The alertness and care shown by staff keep pupils safe and ensure that they feel very secure. This has a very positive effect on their confidence and benefits their learning and personal development.

Although undergoing change, a particular strength in the curriculum is the emphasis given to helping pupils develop the skills that are prerequisites for learning and to become as well equipped as possible for the future. For example, targets in each pupil's individual education plan focus sharply on the skills and personal qualities that make learning possible. Pupils know their targets and are informed about their progress in relation to them. Listening, taking turns when communicating and appropriate behaviour are some of the personal qualities which develop well. Pupils make good progress in communicating because of a caring environment which encourages speaking and listening. The curriculum is successfully matched to individual needs in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, but this is not yet the case throughout the whole school and so hinders progress in raising achievement further. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with particular strengths in the moral and social aspects. This is clearly reflected in pupils' good behaviour, which has seen a marked improvement since the last inspection. Their

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understanding of good health and capacity for taking care of themselves include a knowledge of what constitutes a good diet and an outstanding awareness of the importance of exercising and keeping fit. However, discussion with pupils indicates that not all pupils extend this knowledge into their lives outside of school and the school has begun working with parents and carers to improve this. The development of pupils' independence is enhanced by their excellent contribution to the school and wider community through the helpfulness shown towards each other in school and in supporting charitable causes. The school council has its own budget which it uses effectively to improve the lives of their peers in school. The members have a major voice in the running of the school and have been responsible for a number of major initiatives and changes in the curriculum.

Effective use of assessment develops the staff's knowledge of each pupil and gives rise to detailed lesson planning, good teaching and carefully tailored support for learning. Learning and progress are good. Achievement is good and mathematics is a strength. Across the school, pupils with severe learning difficulties, including those with autistic spectrum disorders, settle well to work, willingly cooperate and sustain their effort. Pupils with multiple learning difficulties are interested in their activities and engage well in lessons. A close check is kept on progress, and good improvement has been made since the last inspection in using assessment data to analyse pupils' performance. Teachers do not yet consistently use their marking to ensure pupils know how to improve their work and to inform them of their next steps in learning.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Raise the profile of healthy lifestyles by engaging parents and carers more effectively to help to ensure pupils follow healthy lifestyles at home as well as in school.
- Raise achievement by:
  - ensuring the approach to the curriculum used in Key Stages 4 and post-16 is adopted across the whole school so it meets the needs of all pupils
  - making sure marking is used consistently by all staff to ensure pupils are aware of how to improve their work and know their next steps in learning.

### **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**2**

Although attainment is low, the confidence with which pupils with severe learning difficulties approach their work gives rise to good learning and progress. They enjoy lessons and good relationships with staff and each other make their interactions positive and learning effective for all pupils, including those from minority ethnic heritages. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders benefit from well-established lesson routines and are clear about the work expected from them. Pupils find learning fun as they enthusiastically join in with games, songs, rhymes and sensory activities. Pupils with multiple learning difficulties make good progress as a result of well-planned sensory work as part of their lessons. The repetition of learning is a

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strong and common feature across the school and for all pupils this leads to good consolidation of their knowledge and skills. For example, acting out various actions in an English lesson helped Key Stage 3 pupils focus and then describe a range of feelings and scenarios. Improvement in provision for both English and mathematics has raised achievement and assessment information shows that a number of students by Year 11 have made exceptional progress from their starting points. Improvements in English, focusing on reading and writing, are underway and there are early indications that these are having a positive impact on achievement as more pupils than in previous years are making better progress than expected. Those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are making good progress and this can be seen in the greater number of national qualifications gained throughout the school.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is above average. Activities are sharply focused on the skills needed for adulthood and the opportunities available to them. Enterprise ventures, work experience and links with other schools and colleges all contribute to the pupils’ good preparation for the future. Students learn about healthy living as an integral part of developing independence, and the extent to which they adopt a healthy lifestyle is good. Many identify healthy food items and take part enthusiastically in sports and physical education lessons. A minority of pupils, however, are not as yet making the connection between developing healthy lifestyles at school with healthy living in their home environment. Pupils’ independence is further enhanced by the many jobs they do to help in school, which assists them in developing workplace skills, relationships and awareness of the needs of others. Pupils engage in a great deal of fundraising for charities, and this gives many of them a wider outlook on life. As a result, they are self-confident, have a strong sense of what is right and good, and act in a friendly, considerate manner towards each other and staff.

*These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes*

<b>Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment <sup>1</sup>	*
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	<b>2</b>
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils’ behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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<b>contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Teachers and their assistants work together effectively to promote learning. Their expertise is well matched to the range of special educational needs and/or disabilities to be found in the school. Teamwork is strengthened by good planning, which makes clear what pupils are expected to learn and pays close attention to their individual targets. Staff have a good knowledge of each pupil through their effective ongoing assessments. Approaches in lessons are closely matched to pupils' needs and capabilities, carefully incorporating work that the pupils enjoy, find challenging and are confident to tackle.

The curriculum is aimed well at improving learning and raising achievement, with excellent partnerships playing a key role in this process. The implementation of some changes is at an early stage. The recent process of matching the curriculum to individual needs at the upper end of the school has generated a wider range of national qualifications being gained and at higher levels. The school is currently looking at ways to extend this process throughout the school. A new scheme of work in mathematics, now well embedded, has had a positive impact on pupils' progress. A similar development has started in English and the curriculum has been reviewed to give greater emphasis to reading and writing supported by new approaches and literacy resources. Clubs, after-school activities and sport add considerable enrichment to learning. For example, the school is the World Tag Rugby Champion.

Pupils make significant gains in self-confidence and independence as a result of the school's very high quality support and guidance. They cope very well with life outside school as a result. This is evident in the way they confidently attend colleges or work experience placements and give presentations to a wide range of community groups. A unified and comprehensive approach has been achieved in meeting pupils' educational, social and emotional needs through very strong partnerships with agencies and families.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

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## How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers at all levels provide clear direction and set high expectations for the school. Clear aims and ambitions inform self-evaluation and drive improvement. Improvements in the use of performance data mean that leaders are setting challenging targets for most of the school. Staff are succeeding in meeting, or exceeding, these and raising achievement. The governing body is committed to the school's increasing success and ensures it is kept well informed of its work. Its members challenge the school effectively as a result and keep a strong focus on improvement. Much of their time and energy has been taken up more recently on meeting the demands of the rebuilding plans, which have proved successful in gaining major funding.

Safeguarding is rigorous and staff plan comprehensively around the needs of each pupil, ensuring risks are assessed and that all are kept safe. The school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination well. A detailed knowledge of individual pupils and their performance ensures that no-one is overlooked, including those of a minority ethnic heritage; all receive equally good opportunities. The school sees itself as a community and works successfully to promote community cohesion. The good links with parents and carers and the outstanding partnerships are testament to this outcome. Staff have roles focusing on maintaining and developing the school's involvement with parents and carers. Improving parents' and carers' capacity to support their children at home is a key aim of the school. Public speaking opportunities for the pupils are organised regularly in school, staff offer home visits and advice and aid parents and carers in obtaining the assistance they need to support them.

Pupils attend a variety of learning opportunities in mainstream and other special schools and there is an extensive enrichment programme for post-16 students provided by schools, college and community groups. Several very strong collaborative professional partnerships ensure child protection, behavioural support and careers guidance are developed thoroughly. Leaders have audited rigorously the promotion of community cohesion, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, pupils' cultural development is good and pupils contribute significantly to the school and wider community through their fundraising. National and global links are good with contacts with several countries and the sponsorship of a child's education overseas. Pupils visit countries such as France to extend their understanding of different ways of life.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the</b>	<b>2</b>

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<b>school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	
<b>The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

Learning and progress are good. The good emphasis on students applying their literacy, numeracy and independence skills prepares them well for the future. They have opportunities to gain qualifications reflecting their achievements and the range of accreditation offered has increased year on year. Strong links with other schools and colleges mean some students have been able to complete GCSE and vocational courses. Teaching and assessment are good. Lively, stimulating lessons engage students with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Other students are challenged by activities and, in particular, by enterprise projects when they work together as teams successfully meeting objectives. The curriculum focuses well on meeting individual needs for the wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. It provides a good variety of subject and work-related options in school and beyond. Leaders are effective in pursuing clear aims in respect of meeting students' needs and preparing students for leaving school. The analysis of students' performance and the use of monitoring information are used well in planning and in securing improvements.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	<b>2</b>
The quality of provision in the sixth form	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management of the sixth form	<b>2</b>

## Views of parents and carers

Those parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire hold very positive views about the school, as exemplified by the following comment. 'My child has not been in the school long but since they started their confidence has grown and there is a desire to learn and achieve.' Many respondents believe their children are making enough progress and all believe their children are kept safe. Many believe the school has helped their children to have a healthy lifestyle. They believe

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that unacceptable behaviour is dealt with effectively. Inspection findings endorse parents' and carers' views in all of these respects. Inspection findings also reflect parents' and carers' views when they say that the school meets their children's particular needs and is led and managed effectively.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at White Spire Special School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 24 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 126 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	10	42	13	54	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	50	12	50	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	10	42	10	42	3	13	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	46	9	38	3	13	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	10	42	9	38	3	13	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	10	42	11	46	3	13	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	42	11	46	2	8	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	10	42	11	46	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	10	42	14	58	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	42	12	50	1	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	33	13	54	3	13	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	10	42	12	50	1	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	12	50	10	42	1	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



12 June 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of White Spire Special School, Milton Keynes MK3 6EW**

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school and especially to the members of the student council who met with inspectors and talked about feeling safe, staying healthy and the way you help others. Here are some of the good things we found out about your school.

- White Spire is a good school.
- The extent to which you feel safe, stay healthy and contribute in school and beyond is outstanding.
- Your behaviour is good.
- The progress you are making in gaining the knowledge and skills you will need in later life is good.
- The work you do is varied, interesting and enjoyable, often because of the excellent links with other schools, colleges and community groups.
- School staff take outstanding care of you and support you exceptionally well.
- The close contact between school and your parents and carers helps enormously.
- The headteacher, staff and the governing body work hard to ensure you have the best opportunities to achieve.

To help the school to be more effective we have asked the school leaders to:

- work harder with your parents and carers to ensure you have healthy lifestyles at home as well as school
- make sure the curriculum meets the needs of each of you
- ensure teachers use marking to help you know how to improve your work.

The inspectors hope you keep up your good work and wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ronald Hall  
Lead inspector

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