

# White Spire School

Rickley Lane, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, MK3 6EW

**Inspection dates** 13–14 March 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. The quality of teaching has shown consistent improvement since the previous inspection. Teachers know their pupils very well and almost always make sure that learning activities are well matched to the pupils' needs and abilities.
- Most pupils achieve well, particularly in literacy, communication and numeracy. Pupils in the sixth form make equally good progress and this prepares them well for their future.
- The pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They enjoy school; they have extremely positive relations with other pupils and with adults and their attitudes to learning are excellent.
- Adults manage behaviour very successfully. The pupils are well cared for. They feel safe and secure, their attendance is above average and their parents confirm how much they like school.
- The headteacher and her senior team lead the school well. Together they check the school's progress regularly and effectively. They are supported by the governing body and local authority, both of which offer well-informed challenge to the school's leaders.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to enable a higher rate of outstanding progress.
- There are occasional inconsistencies in assessment which means teachers are not able to plan as sharply for the next step in learning or to adapt work precisely enough for each individual pupil. This can slow down the pace of progress.
- Feedback to pupils, either orally or in marking of completed work, does not always show pupils clearly how well they are doing or how to improve further.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons and part of lessons, the great majority of which were observed jointly with senior staff.
- Meetings were held with middle and senior managers, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a local authority representative.
- Inspectors took into account the records of parents' views collected annually since the previous inspection. There were too few responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, to be counted. The inspection team looked also at 35 returned staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and forward planning. Records of pupils' progress, behaviour and well-being were looked at as well as monitoring reports on teaching, the performance management of staff and the curriculum. Attendance records were checked as well as the procedures relating to the safeguarding of the pupils.

## Inspection team

Melvyn Blackband, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Ian McAllister

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized special school and includes a sixth form. Two thirds of pupils are boys.
- Most pupils have moderate learning difficulties with associated complex needs and a minority have behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The majority of pupils are White British in origin with a small number of other pupils from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. A very small minority of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A higher than average proportion of pupils are eligible for pupil-premium funding, which is available for pupils who are entitled to free school meals or in local authority care.

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

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
  - making sure teachers are consistent in the way they assess each pupil's small steps in learning so that they can plan future work with greater precision
  - giving clear verbal and written feedback to pupils so that they understand how well they are doing and how to make their work even better.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- The pupils' rate of progress has increased since the previous inspection. The majority of pupils make progress at levels expected nationally in similar schools and a growing minority exceed these levels.
- All pupils enter the school with low levels of attainment. By the time they leave the great majority have gained nationally accredited qualifications at Entry Level and in BTEC work-related subjects. A minority achieve success at the lower levels of GCSE in English, mathematics and textiles. Sixth-form pupils successfully build on these qualifications by studying for higher levels of the courses.
- Pupils who receive the pupil premium and Year 7 'Catch-up' funding have made good progress over the last two years. The school has used the funding successfully to increase intensive support for the pupils in literacy and numeracy and in providing, where appropriate, specific social and emotional support. Levels of individual learning have been increased. This has contributed to the pupils' success and they have significantly narrowed the gap in their achievement with other pupils in the school.
- All groups of pupils make equally good progress as a result of the school's work. This includes pupils from minority ethnic groups and the small proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Pupils make good progress in communication, literacy and numeracy. Specific programmes in the primary department in the teaching of phonics (matching letters and their sounds) have helped most pupils to increase their reading scores. The pupils love reading and the newly refurbished library is well used.
- Pupils in the secondary department continue their reading work through an emphasis in all subjects on reading and writing and apply these skills throughout the day. Where pupils are not keeping up in reading they benefit from intensive programmes tailored to their individual needs.
- Sixth-form pupils make equally good progress. Their curriculum ensures they apply their basic skills in a range of academic, work-related and life-skills activities. This enables them to gain qualifications which prepare them well for the next stage in their education or training.
- The emphasis throughout the school on physical education is a strength. Younger pupils benefit from national sports funding for primary schools and the emphasis is maintained throughout the school. Excellent facilities and equipment enable pupils to take part in and enjoy a range of activities and this adds significantly to their self-confidence and personal development.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is almost always good and sometimes outstanding throughout the school, including in the sixth form. Standards of teaching have shown a steady rise since the previous inspection because of regular checks by the senior team. As a result, the rate of progress of almost every pupil, including those from minority groups and pupils eligible for extra funding, has shown consistent improvement over time.
- Teachers have high expectations of the pupils. They plan challenging activities which keep the interest of pupils and motivate them to try their best. For instance, Year 10 pupils studying a Shakespeare play for GCSE were asked to read the speeches individually in acting out a scene and then role play characters, answering questions from the class about their character and why they acted as they did. The pupils responded well to the challenge and made excellent progress during the lesson.
- Adults are skilled at adapting their teaching to take account of pupils' responses. They ask probing questions which help pupils to extend and consolidate their knowledge and understanding and teachers successfully target their questions to take account of the different needs and abilities of their pupils.

- They are well supported by classroom assistants, many of whom have specialised in different kinds of work, such as reading or physical education. The pupils benefit from a high level of individual tuition and support and this encourages them to concentrate hard and to try new things. As a result, relationships are excellent. Pupils enjoy their lessons and try hard to succeed in them.
- Teachers use assessment effectively in planning the next steps for each pupil. On occasion, however, there are inconsistencies in the quality of recording the assessment and this makes it harder for teachers to plan sharply for each pupil and the pace of learning can slow down.
- Sometimes, also, teachers do not give clear enough feedback to pupils about the quality of their efforts, either in discussing work with the pupil or in their marking of pupils' books. Pupils therefore do not always know how to make their work a little bit better at the next attempt.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Pupils confirm that they enjoy school tremendously. Their attendance is above average and high compared to similar schools. They invariably concentrate very well in lessons and they are enthusiastic learners, always ready to answer questions and contribute to discussion. Their attitudes to their work are exemplary. This has a significant positive impact on their progress in lessons.
- The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding. They behave very well in the classroom, at lunchtime and out on the playground. Pupils happily take turns and support others on the playground equipment, and enjoy meeting and talking with their friends at lunchtime. The pupils help ensure that their school is a happy and harmonious place of learning. The school is characterised by excellent relationships between pupils and with adults.
- Adults manage behaviour very well. Pupils understand and respond positively to the established and consistently applied reward system. The school's expertise in promoting 'restorative principles' of conduct helps the pupils to see where they have slipped up and how to put things right. As a result, they develop a very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- There is very little incidence of bullying of any kind including cyber-bullying. Pupils learn successfully to combat unpleasantness through the outstanding role models of adults, by effective personal, social and health education and through, where appropriate, individual counselling and support.
- When, on occasion, incidents do occur, they are dealt with quickly and sensitively by adults and to the satisfaction of pupils and parents. The school's records, confirmed by pupils and their parents, show a significant and consistent decrease in behavioural incidents since the previous inspection and this has been accompanied by a consequent significant improvement in the pupils' behaviour.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The pupils are well known by the adults. They relate very well to their teachers and other adults and they chat happily and confidently to them in classrooms and at lunchtime. Adults as a result very quickly pick up any problems or unhappiness. Procedures for child protection, the employment of staff and health and safety are very effectively managed.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The headteacher shows great dedication and energy. She has continued to give strong direction and effective leadership to the school since the previous inspection. She is supported by experienced senior staff and middle leaders who make an increasingly successful contribution to the school's improvement. The primary, secondary and sixth form departments are well led. Staff confirm that they derive satisfaction from working at the school and feel suitably involved in planning and decision taking. Morale is high.
- Through rigorous and regular monitoring, the senior team has ensured that teaching standards continue to rise. This is accompanied by effective management of the performance of teachers,

whose work is evaluated against national standards. Teachers are encouraged to maintain improvements through many opportunities for further training and development of their skills.

- Their performance is convincingly linked to levels of pay and responsibility. These measures have contributed substantially to the improvement in teaching standards with just a few inconsistencies remaining, such as occasional lapses in assessment procedure and in giving appropriate feedback to pupils about their work.
- Senior staff maintain a good overview of the school through comprehensive tracking and recording of the pupils' progress. Swift intervention is provided should a pupil find difficulties. All the pupils are encouraged and expected to do well. Equal opportunities are at the heart of the school's work and there is no discrimination.
- Self-evaluation is effective. Leaders are well aware of occasional shortcomings in teaching and have prepared suitable action plans. There is detailed and realistic planning for improvement. The school's leaders are effectively challenged and supported by the governing body and by the local authority. There has been a good track record of continued improvement in pupils' progress and standards of teaching since the previous inspection and there is a good capacity to maintain this improvement.
- The curriculum has been effectively adapted to meet the needs of the pupils. There is a suitable emphasis on the development of basic skills and personal and social skills, often through physical education. Older pupils are encouraged to aim high and are given a wide range of opportunities to follow work-related and academic courses, all leading to preparation for college or further training.
- Sixth form study enables pupils to build on their examination successes at higher levels, to develop their life skills and independence and so to go on confidently to the next stage in their education. As a result of strong procedures to support the pupils' personal and social skills, they make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are outstanding and meet statutory requirements.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are well informed about the pupils' progress and how it compares with similar schools. The governing body critically examines all aspects of pupils' achievement and teaching standards and provides positive challenge to the school's leadership. Governors manage finances appropriately; they have a clear monitoring role in performance management and are very well informed about pupil-premium funding and its impact on pupils' progress. Governors undergo regular training in, for instance, finance and child protection. They are up to date in regulations regarding the appointment of staff and ensure they monitor health and safety and the safeguarding of children.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	110575
<b>Local authority</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Inspection number</b>	432062

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

<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>	143
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	25
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Andrew Gale
<b>Headteacher</b>	Maria Penicud
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9–10 June 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01908 373266
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