

Heart of the Forest Community Special School

Speech House, Coleford, GL16 7EJ

Inspection dates 25–26 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school takes effective action to enable the overwhelming majority of pupils to reach their potential, taking into account their starting points.
- The vast majority of pupils make good progress. They learn well in literacy and numeracy which helps them to develop useful life skills. They are prepared well for the next stage of their education or training.
- Teaching is usually good and occasionally outstanding. A small amount of teaching requires improvement. Teachers understand their pupils' strengths and needs and they plan interesting lessons which stretch and stimulate them.
- Pupils' good behaviour contributes to good learning. Challenging behaviour is well managed and rarely disrupts lessons. Pupils say that they feel safe at school.
- School leaders at all levels, including governors, are ambitious for the school. They work well together and have improved teaching and pupils' achievements. The curriculum provides a variety of stimulating learning experiences although there are some gaps in provision.
- The sixth form is good. Standards are improving because teaching is good and focuses on the knowledge and skills students will need for the next stage of their learning and lives.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are a few lessons where there is too much teacher talk and insufficient pace and challenge to fully match pupils' needs.
- The curriculum does not yet fully cover the range of different cultures and lifestyles in the United Kingdom and further afield.
- Provision for sex and relationships education is not sufficiently well planned.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons taught by 14 teachers amounting to six and a quarter hours of inspection time spent in classrooms or the school hall.
- Inspectors observed pupils as they arrived at school, in the playground and during lunchtimes. One inspector observed a morning assembly, joined pupils for lunch and attended a music therapy session.
- Meetings were held with school leaders including members of the governing body.
- An inspector met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met pupils to gain their views about the school and to talk with them about their progress, their likes and dislikes.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 14 parents and carers who provided responses to the Parent View questionnaire. School surveys of parent carer opinion were also reviewed. Inspectors scrutinised staff questionnaires and reviewed key documents provided by the school.
- During learning walks around the school, inspectors briefly visited classrooms and looked at information provided for pupils, displays and other art work.

Inspection team

Bob Pugh, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Christine Emerson

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Heart of the Forest School provides for pupils who have severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD).
- A growing number of pupils have additional needs, for example autistic spectrum disorder. There are more boys than girls and all but a very few pupils come from a White British background.
- All pupils of statutory school age have statements. Approximately 20% of pupils are believed to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is higher than the national average.
- Since the last inspection, the move into purpose-built accommodation has been completed.
- At the time of the last inspection, the headteacher had been in post for a very short time.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build upon recent improvements to teaching so that the level of challenge for all pupils is always good or better in all lessons. Ensure that learning gets off to a brisk start in every lesson and that introductions by staff are not too long so that pupils lose concentration.
- Further enrich the curriculum by:
 - providing more activities which address differences and similarities in beliefs and lifestyles between people in different communities in the United Kingdom and further afield
 - including more structured programmes where pupils and students gain appropriate information about sex and relationships.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils enter this school with learning levels which are well below the national average. They make good progress from their starting points during their years at the school and are well prepared for the next stage of their education or training by the time they leave.
- The rates at which pupils make progress have increased since the previous inspection. Analysis of recent assessments demonstrates that the vast majority make progress which is at least as good as other pupils in similar schools. In many cases, progress is better than expected. A small number of pupils make less than expected progress.
- Pupils make good progress irrespective of their disabilities and special educational needs. Girls and boys make equally good progress, as do those known to be eligible for the pupil premium and the very few pupils who are not from a White British background.
- Many pupils make significant improvements in reading. They read stories and magazine articles, making good use of the skills which they have learned in carefully planned sounds development and letter recognition lessons. Pupils were keen to read to inspectors, from books and from their own written work; for example, one older student read her account of a trip with a family member to a university. A younger pupil gained great pleasure from the reading skills she had developed and demonstrated how much she understood in a story by both asking and answering questions about it.
- Pupils, and students in the sixth form, enjoy leisure and sporting success. They are proud of their efforts in team games against other schools and have created a magnificent display in the school celebrating these achievements and relating them to the success of athletes in the Paralympics. One older student was very keen to demonstrate to an inspector how he had overcome considerable difficulties to learn to play the piano.
- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress against the challenging targets that are set for them.
- Students' achievements in the sixth form are good. Students work hard to gain accreditation for the tasks they have completed in subjects such as enterprise and physical education.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers in nearly all lessons have high expectations and use their close knowledge of pupils' strengths and weaknesses to plan lessons which challenge each individual to do well. Because of this, rates of progress made by pupils have increased in the past three years.
- Teachers regularly check on how much progress pupils are making by asking questions and by giving effective verbal feedback. Written feedback in books and files is also effective and provides a record of how well a pupil has done, alongside information about what will be learned next. Teachers regularly ask pupils to assess their own work and they encourage them to comment on the efforts of others. This promotes even better understanding of the lesson.
- Reading and writing are taught effectively. Pupils who need to improve in reading and writing are provided with well-targeted support by teachers and by their assistants and, as a result, standards have risen. Great care was taken by one pupil in a good English lesson, with the guidance of a teaching assistant, to form the letters of her name using a hand-held technology device. She proudly displayed her work to others in her group.
- The skilled teaching assistants know individual pupils well and consequently make a strong contribution to the good learning which is typical in the great majority of lessons.
- The teaching of mathematics is good. In all subjects, teachers make the most of opportunities to promote strong numeracy and practical mathematics skills. For example, in a good physical education lesson in the sixth form, the teacher encouraged students to estimate how far away a ball was from the target and then to measure with a tape to check how accurate their estimations were. Similarly, a highly effective food technology lesson provided pupils with many opportunities to improve sequencing skills, counting, and

weighing, as well as learning to turn-take in conversations.

- Very occasionally, lessons are not so well planned to fully meet individual needs and consequently lack strong challenge. In these few lessons, there is too much teacher talk, the pace drops, teaching assistants are not used so effectively and the behaviour of some pupils is not as good as it should be.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- In the overwhelming majority of lessons, including in the sixth form, pupils and students are very positive about learning and this results in good behaviour for almost all of the time.
- Staff, parents, carers, pupils and students typically say that behaviour and safety are good. Pupils say that they are well cared for and feel safe from bullying.
- When a pupil's behaviour becomes challenging, staff move quickly to calm the situation. A particularly good example of this was seen in one class when a pupil moved away from the teaching table to another part of the room. He was immediately reassured by an assistant who helped him to choose then read a familiar story. The learning of other pupils was not interrupted at all.
- Very many pupils have taken important steps towards learning to manage their own behaviour as a result of good teaching and guidance at the school.
- A calm atmosphere is promoted from the very start of the day. Pupils and students arrive in an orderly manner. Those who can make their way to class independently, are encouraged to do so, while those who need more help are escorted with care and attention.
- Rooms are well prepared for learning and pupils are welcomed into class with enthusiasm. This means that they are ready to learn immediately.
- The school site, equipment and resources have been well planned to make sure that pupils are as safe as they can be. A good number of staff are available to supervise at breaks and lunchtimes. Pupils were seen to be playing team games creatively, or just enjoying free time with friends.
- Pupils treat each other and staff with courtesy and are in turn treated with respect by others. Good manners were observed during lunchtime and interesting and lively conversations could be heard across the lunch tables.
- Bullying of any kind is extremely rare at this school. Those few incidents which do occur are properly recorded and efficiently dealt with by staff. There are no fixed-term or permanent exclusions.
- Attendance is above average for special schools, which is an improvement since the last inspection.

The leadership and management are good

- All leaders and managers have worked diligently to raise standards since the last inspection. They have successfully communicated their high expectations and ambition to the school community. They have used the pupil premium effectively, to boost rates of progress in reading for those pupils who are eligible to receive it.
- School leaders and managers have underlined their expectations by developing very effective strategies for monitoring the work of the school and they plan improvements based on what they have found. Monitoring provides good quality information about how good teaching is and how much progress pupils are making, and this information is used well.
- They have fostered a real sense of sharing of ideals and working together to improve the school. One teacher commented that all staff have a say in school improvement, there is no sense that it is something that is 'done to us'.
- Highly effective performance management programmes for all staff have been introduced. Teachers speak very positively about their experiences of performance management and

the opportunities which have been provided for further professional development.

- The school's curriculum provides well-organised opportunities for learning for all pupils and students who attend the school, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the sixth form.
- Rich learning experiences away from school, such as on residential trips, are a notable strength.
- Whilst planning aimed at developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is usually good, there are some missed opportunities to promote learning about different faiths and lifestyles.
- The planning for individual subjects within the curriculum is generally good, although planning for sex and relationships education is not as strong. No visual information or advice about where to go for help was noted, for example, for older pupils and those in the sixth form.
- The local authority provides light touch support for this good school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- is good because governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses
 - has ensured that funds made available via the pupil premium have been used to provide high quality intervention and support, for example to help children make progress with reading
 - has ensured that all statutory safeguarding requirements are in place, including staff training and appropriate checking.
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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	134190
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	402598

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	94
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Henchley
Headteacher	Melissa Bradshaw
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 January 2010
Telephone number	01594 822175
Fax number	01594 826472
Email address	admin@heartoftheforest.gloucs.sch.uk

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