

Heaton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106173
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	377365
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2012
Lead inspector	Brian Padgett HMI

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Not Applicable
Number of pupils on the school roll	90
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	38
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Beryl Barnett
Headteacher	Elizabeth Seers
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2009
School address	St James Road Heaton Moor Stockport SK4 4RE
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Introduction

Inspection team

Brian Padgett
Maureen Coleman

Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Thirteen lessons were observed, meetings were held with parents, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation provided by the school, which included students' portfolios, teachers' planning, assessments of students' progress and information about safeguarding and child protection. Questionnaire returns from staff and students were analysed along with 38 returns from the questionnaires sent out to parents and carers.

Information about the school

Heaton School is a special school catering for students aged 11-19 with complex learning difficulties. All students have statements of special educational needs. The main categories of need are severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder. However, many students have additional needs, particularly communication difficulties and those of a medical nature. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high (31%). Nearly all students are of White British heritage. Six students are in the care of the local authority.

The school's sixth form, the provision for 16-19 year-olds, is called the Extended Education Department. A proportion of students joins this department each year from other special schools and specially resourced units in mainstream secondary schools to continue their education.

The school has Performing Arts Specialist College status. It provides extended services by way of after-school clubs, a youth club and a holiday club for students. There are facilities for multi-agency work, particularly with health professionals and to support parents and carers.

The school has been completely refurbished since the last inspection.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- This is an outstanding school. Students are provided for extremely well in a highly-inclusive setting. They make exceptional progress. The school provides high-quality educational opportunities, especially in the performing arts, art and design and physical education.
- All students achieve equally well. They make at least good progress in their academic work and exceptional progress in their personal development and in their preparation for independent life.
- Students enjoy their lessons. They are very keen to come to school. They feel safe and they behave very well. Those students who exhibit very challenging behaviour as part of their learning difficulties make outstanding progress in managing their behaviour and working towards independence.
- Students benefit from teaching and learning opportunities of the highest quality. Teaching observed was never less than good with some that was outstanding. Teachers have much expertise and all staff are extremely committed to the students, their learning and welfare.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. All aspects are effective, most highly so. The headteacher has achieved her vision of an inclusive school, where students with a wide range of complex learning difficulties learn successfully in harmony. The school runs extremely smoothly because it is managed so well; it has a very good ethos. The assessment and analysis of students' progress has improved significantly. Further refinement of assessment is under way and is needed for teachers to identify, mark and build on what are often very small gains in students' knowledge and understanding.
- The Extended Education Department is outstanding. By the time students are ready to leave the school they have become mature, positive young people with excellent attitudes to learning who are respectful of others. They have many

achievements and accreditations to their names. They provide highly-appropriate role models for the younger students to aspire to.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to refine the assessment of students' progress by identifying the smallest gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. Use this information in order to demonstrate students' progress more clearly, to provide even more focused learning objectives for students.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Students' levels of attainment on entry to the school vary widely. They range from the very lowest levels that can be recorded to the early levels of the National Curriculum. While progress is always in very small steps and is rarely linear, most students make at least good progress in the subjects they study, whether measured against school targets or national comparisons. They make exceptional progress in their personal development, their communication skills, and in the skills and knowledge they need for future life. They also gain a great deal from the school's specialist provision in the many aspects of the performing arts and physical education. Responses from parents and carers provided strong endorsement about the progress their children make. They particularly spoke and wrote of the improvements in self-esteem, maturity and in their children's speech and communication skills.

Students from all categories of need and from all backgrounds do equally well. Several students have talents or are gifted in particular subjects. These students are supported to attain the best of their ability; some attend mainstream schools, with support, studying alongside mainstream students.

Although some lessons are taught to students of a particular category of need, most are taught in mixed classes. Skilled teaching and excellent support ensure individual needs are met and that the more able are challenged to achieve their best. All students gain from the inclusive nature of the classes. The integrated nature of the school promotes students' respect for the needs of others extremely well.

The emphasis for students in the lower school is on achievement in the core skills of literacy, numeracy, science, physical education and in personal and social education. There is a strong emphasis on developing speech and communication and on reading. Further up the school and especially in the Extended Education Department, the focus changes to preparing students for the next stage of education and for independence, through, for example, lessons on food preparation and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. The school has an excellent record for students gaining accreditations in life skills and in providing work experience.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers are expert at teaching students with a wide range of disabilities and learning difficulties. Subject knowledge is good, whether of curriculum subjects or of the nature of students' learning difficulties. Teachers know their students' individual needs extremely well. Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Staff are extremely positive with students, praising them at every opportunity. Students are greeted personally the moment they step into school from their transport in the morning. Staff are sensitive to how students are feeling and to the smallest sign of progress. They adapt quickly to changing circumstances, managing challenging behaviour extremely well. Lessons are planned with clear subject and personal learning objectives for each student, although it may take a number of lessons before these are fully attained. The teachers could not achieve what they do without the support of the teams of teaching assistants and the input of health professionals. The class teams work together very closely. In an outstanding drama lesson with older students, for example, the teacher and assistants worked seamlessly together, often using no more than eye contact to identify to each other where intervention and encouragement were needed. Also, when students on the autistic spectrum were unable to cope with lessons, staff reacted quickly, following pre-prepared procedures to ensure the safety of all students and minimum disruption to learning. Teaching assistants are well briefed and take a full part in assessment during the regular reviews of students' progress. Staff have the full confidence of parents and carers, who, in general, are delighted by their friendly and professional approach.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour and attitude to learning of most students are excellent. Students of all disabilities and learning difficulties, including the most profound and complex, show a clear enjoyment of school. Students who exhibit extremes of challenging behaviour because of the nature of their learning difficulties make outstanding progress in managing their behaviour. By the time they reach the top of the school, in the Extended Education Department, the behaviour and attitudes of such students bear little resemblance to those when they entered the school. For example, in a Year 14 art and design lesson, a student initially diagnosed on the enhanced level of the autistic spectrum left the lesson quietly of his own accord and returned when he felt calm continue with his work. The expertise of staff in promoting students' self-esteem, in anticipating when incidents may arise and in rapidly deploying well-practiced procedures to ensure safety, is crucial to ensuring the calm and well-ordered classrooms. Any bullying that arises is dealt with immediately, considerably aided by excellent communications between home and school and the confidence parents and carers have in senior management to take immediate action. As a consequence, students feel as safe in school as it is possible to feel.

Progress in behaviour and attitudes are extended to life at home. Parents and carers provided graphic accounts of the improvement in family life as a consequence of the effectiveness of the school's positive impact on students' behaviour and attitudes. Students' enjoyment of school is demonstrated in their outstanding attendance. Attendance has shown steady improvement over the past three years. It now stands

at above the average for mainstream secondary schools despite the necessary absences caused when students attend hospital for medical reasons.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. The headteacher's vision for the school, of a fully inclusive community, where students with a diverse range of disabilities and learning difficulties have equal and every opportunity to succeed, is realised. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. It is considerably enhanced by the school's extended provision of after-school clubs, holiday activities and visits out of school. Procedures to ensure that students are safeguarded are extremely rigorous, so that the vulnerable students educated here are as safe as possible and free from discrimination.

An illustration of the effectiveness of leadership and management is provided by the school's success in managing the recent complete refurbishment, during which time different sections of the school were distributed in spare accommodation around the local authority. Rather than being diminished by the disruption, the school has become stronger.

In all areas of leadership and management, the school can point to improvements from the existing strengths recorded in its last inspection. Notable are improvements evidenced in the accuracy and development of assessment in all subjects, in the analysis of students' progress, in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching effectiveness (linked clearly to performance management) and in developing leadership within middle management. These developments indicate the school has an outstanding capacity for yet further improvement.

Staff questionnaire returns show the confidence staff have in the senior team. Staff enjoy working at the school, not least because they are developing their skills and expertise through continuing professional development and opportunities to develop leading-edge practice. Morale is high. Senior leaders are well served by the governing body, which provides challenge as well as support and is composed of a judicious mix of governors who are parents and carers and those who bring to bear relevant professional skills and expertise.

The curriculum is outstanding. It provides very clearly for the broad range of students' learning needs, particularly in communication, and, over time, develops very well the functional and independence skills they need for life in the future. The school's specialist status as a performing arts college adds a notable extra dimension to students' learning, enjoyment and achievement. The school has productive partnership arrangements with other schools. Students from other schools join Heaton School students for lessons and vice versa. The school has excellent partnerships with parents and carers and with health professionals, supported by very effective communication systems.

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	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



16 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Heaton School, Stockport SK4 4RE

You may remember when two inspectors spent two days in your school recently. They visited your lessons. I hope we did not disturb you too much. My inspector colleague and I came to see how well you learn at Heaton School. Thank you for making us welcome. We enjoyed the time we spent meeting you, watching you learn and talking to your teachers and support staff. This letter is to tell you what we found.

We have given your school our top grade of 'outstanding'. This is because the school is excellent at helping you achieve your best, helping you develop into fine young people and preparing you for life in the future. Mrs Seers and the staff do this by providing you with outstanding teaching, excellent guidance in your personal development and lessons that are interesting and fun. All of you achieve extremely well, regardless of your starting points and however difficult you find learning. My colleague and I were very impressed by how you look out for, encourage and help each other.

Even though the school is in our top category, Mrs Seers and the staff have exciting plans to make the school better still. The school's track record of improvement to date suggests that this is what will happen. However, our single point for improvement, on which the school has already made a start, is to measure your learning in finer detail, to make sure that your progress can be seen more clearly. I hope this will provide useful information to teachers to focus even more sharply on what you need to do next. I know that teachers already share your targets with you and with your parents and carers and that you will all want to continue to be involved in planning your work and seeing how well you are achieving.

With my very best wishes for your future,

Yours sincerely,

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector

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