

Five Acre Wood School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	119055
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	379715
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2012
Lead inspector	Jon Carter

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	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	183
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Baker
Headteacher	Peggy Murphy
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 February 2009
School address	Boughton Lane Maidstone Kent ME15 9QL
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Age group	4–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

Jon Carter	Additional inspector
Jackie Blount	Additional inspector
Joanna Jones	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 21 lessons. Twenty teachers were seen and informal discussions were held with pupils during these lessons. Meetings were held with a representative of the governing body and members of staff holding leadership responsibilities at the school. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at assessment information, the school's analysis of pupils' progress, curriculum plans, minutes of governing body meetings and records of the school leaders' lesson monitoring. Inspectors also analysed responses from the 59 questionnaires received from parents and carers.

Information about the school

Five Acre Wood is larger in size than the average special school. All pupils at the school have a statement of special educational needs. These are mainly severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Pupils are organised into classes which take account of their age, development, special educational needs and disabilities. There is one Reception class in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school's provision for pupils over the age of 16 is located on the site of a mainstream secondary school some distance away from the main school. The largest ethnic group in the school is made up of pupils from White British backgrounds. The school has a smaller than average percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. A very small minority of pupils speak English as an additional language. Most of these are at a very early stage of learning English but are also at any early stage of learning any language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is larger than average. The school holds the Inclusion Quality Mark.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Pupils make good progress in their learning because the curriculum is adapted to meet their needs very effectively and is taught well. Planning takes good account of individual pupils' levels of development. As a result, learning activities successfully engage and motivate pupils.
- A recent focus on training to develop teachers' communication skills has been effective. Teachers routinely incorporate the use of signs and symbols into conversations with pupils so that their achievement in reading, writing and communication develops well.
- As the result of effective planning, pupils are provided with comprehensive support throughout the school. Where teaching assistants are deployed effectively in lessons, this support contributes strongly to good learning and progress. However, in a minority of lessons, the development of pupils' independence is slower because teaching assistants do more for pupils than is necessary. Pupils' behaviour is good and they feel very safe.
- The school's post-16 provision is good. Pupils develop skills that prepare them well for the next stage of life. They demonstrate increasing levels of resourcefulness, collaboration and independence. Pupils successfully achieve a range of accreditation by the time they leave the provision irrespective of the levels of difficulty they experience due to their special educational needs.
- Leaders and managers successfully drive improvement. The headteacher and senior leaders communicate their vision for the school effectively. All staff are involved in developing the improvement plan and consequently have a thorough understanding of the strategic direction of the school. The governing body have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because they have regular contact with the leadership team. However, their understanding of the quality of learning in the classroom often relies on reports from the headteacher because visits to lessons are less frequent.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency with which teaching assistants in all classes help pupils to develop independence by ensuring that:
 - the number of teaching assistants deployed in each class is appropriately limited

- teaching assistants are provided with opportunities to observe best practice in learning support within the school and in other schools
 - the effectiveness of teaching assistants is rigorously monitored
 - teaching assistants are held accountable for the effectiveness of support they provide.
- Improve the effectiveness with which the governing body promote improved progress for pupils, by:
- establishing a programme of visits to classrooms for members to increase their first-hand knowledge of the work of the school
 - using the information gained from these visits, together with reports from the headteacher, to support and challenge senior leaders more effectively.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils join the school in different year groups with levels of development that are below age-related expectations due to the nature of their disabilities and special educational needs. In lessons, pupils usually make good progress from these starting points. They respond particularly positively to opportunities that allow them to work in small groups with their peers. For example, pupils in Key Stage 2 enjoyed being able to develop their understanding of direction by helping the lost bear to find his way around a map of the school. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties develop their communication skills well. The small steps of progress they make build up steadily over time and lead to accreditation by the time they leave the school's post-16 provision. An even wider range of accreditation is achieved by pupils with less severe disabilities, although standards of attainment remain low compared with all pupils nationally. Pupils make particularly strong progress in personal, social and health education lessons.

Pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, make slightly better progress in their reading, writing and communication skills than in mathematics. However, this is mainly as a result of an increased focus on communication across the school. Over time, progress in both English and mathematics is improving steadily for all pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language. While inspection evidence and pupils' current work indicate that attainment in reading at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 is low compared to that of all pupils nationally, appropriate strategies are used to develop pupils' reading skills at a good pace. For more able pupils, this includes an effective systematic phonics approach where pupils learn about the sounds letters make. Pupils at earlier stages of development or those with particular disabilities and special educational needs make good progress through symbol and whole word recognition.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the progress their children make as a result of staff's good knowledge of their individual needs and preferences. They are particularly pleased about how well the school helps pupils to develop a range of life skills, especially in the school's post-16 provision. Inspection evidence supports this view.

Quality of teaching

Assessment systems are robust and ensure that the small steps of progress made by pupils are recognised and recorded. Lesson planning makes good and effective use of this information. Learning intentions for pupils are clear and teachers set realistic but challenging objectives for individuals and groups during lessons. Pupils are encouraged, where appropriate to their level of development, to contribute to assessments about their own learning. This helps them to demonstrate their understanding, improves their communication skills and provides opportunities for reflection.

Teachers deliver lessons enthusiastically, usually taking good account of pupils' special educational needs and disabilities through appropriate and well-planned adaptations to the curriculum. For example, pupils with profound disabilities are given tasks which help them learn to develop eye contact while more able pupils are expected to use dictionaries and critically evaluate their written work. Learning activities are typically well paced and presented as individualised tasks to suit the different levels of development in the class. This engages pupils well with their learning. Small-group activities, observed regularly during the inspection, contribute strongly to pupils' good spiritual, moral and social development.

Teachers are particularly skilful at posing and answering questions which extends pupils' learning well and make purposeful links with other subjects, particularly reading and writing. In a particularly effective personal and social education lesson for Key Stage 4 boys, pupils contributed well to discussions about sex and relationships because staff responded sensitively to their questions within clear boundaries.

Teaching assistants are usually well deployed to support the learning and progress of individuals and groups of pupils. This is particularly effective in the school's post-16 provision, where pupils' independence is promoted well. However, in a minority of lessons, teaching assistants are less effective at promoting learning and development. This is because too many staff are deployed to work directly with an individual or group, or because they give the pupils they are working with too much help.

A very large majority of parents and carers feel that their child is taught well at this school. Inspection evidence supports this view overall, although not all pupils receive consistently good quality support that develops their independence well.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils enjoy coming to school and usually engage enthusiastically with new experiences. Their behaviour in lessons and conduct around the school is typically good. On the few occasions that pupils' behaviour falls short of the standards expected, teachers respond effectively and consistently, taking good account of the special educational needs of individuals. Disruption to lessons caused by off-task behaviour is rare because staff respond in a planned and measured way to refocus the pupil concerned. The integrated nature of therapy and education ensures that pupils lose the minimum possible time from their education while being able to

access support for their speech, language, communication and physical needs.

Pupils' relationships with staff are warm and friendly, showing that they feel safe in school. This contributes strongly to the positive learning environment that exists in classrooms. All pupils visit mainstream schools weekly, providing good opportunities for them to interact with other children and develop social skills. Good participation in a comprehensive personal, social and health education curriculum ensures that pupils gain a developmentally appropriate understanding of risk through activities such as travel training. Attendance is broadly average when compared to all pupils nationally. Punctuality to school and lessons is good.

The very large majority of parents and carers have positive views of behaviour at school. Bullying of any description is a concept that they and their children find difficult to associate with the school due to the attention and care shown to pupils by staff. Inspection evidence supports this view because staff are quick to manage the very rare instances where behaviour falls below the school's expectations.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers at all levels, including members of the governing body, have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Clear communication between staff and senior leaders has ensured that they share a common vision for the school. The governing body is active in its support of the school's leadership team and provides appropriate levels of challenge through their involvement in school improvement planning. However, while members of the governing body visit the school regularly, they have limited opportunities to visit classrooms independently to gain first-hand experience of learning.

Improvements in pupils' literacy skills have been successfully achieved following a period of professional development for teachers. The use of signing and symbols to support communication is now well established among teaching staff. Not all teaching assistants are as confident in their use. As a result, they use these systems less consistently. Monitoring of the quality of teaching is well established, thorough and accurate. However, similar systems for monitoring the quality of support given by teaching assistants are less well established and consequently they are not held to account sufficiently well for the progress pupils make. Nevertheless, the improvements in pupils' progress since the time of the previous inspection demonstrate that the school has good capacity to improve further.

The school makes good provision for pupils' needs through the very effective adaptations it makes to the curriculum and the suitable range of accreditation it offers pupils towards the end of their school career. The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, new learning opportunities provided by sensory activities and subjects such as music and science excite pupils and stimulate their interest in the world around them.

Leaders and managers at all levels promote equality and tackle discrimination well. The caring school ethos, comprehensive awareness of pupils' individual needs and proactive approach to securing multi-agency support clearly demonstrate the school's commitment to equality and inclusion. For example, a few individual pupils benefit

from the academic challenge and social development provided by inclusion in mainstream classes at other local schools. This commitment has been recognised by the award of the Inclusion Quality Mark. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are managed appropriately.

The school engages well with most parents and carers and takes good account of their suggestions and concerns. It makes good provision for communication with parents and carers, and links are strongly enhanced by the work of the school's family support team. The 'shared goals' planning and person-centred review systems connect the school and family effectively, ensuring pupils have consistency across both settings.

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 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.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
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.



30 January 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone ME15 9QL

Thank you for welcoming us to your school when we visited recently. It was good to speak to you about your school and watch you enjoying your lessons. You told us that you feel safe at school and that your teachers are interested in what you have to say about school.

Five Acre Wood is a good school. Pupils at your school learn well and make good progress. You make very good progress in personal, health and social education lessons. We were impressed by some of the discussions we listened to in your lessons. Teachers make sure the work you do helps you to learn new things and practise skills you find hard. They are very good at asking you questions that make you think carefully. Most of the time, you get good support from the teaching assistants in your classes. Sometimes, though, they do too much for you.

We have seen that the teachers who lead your school have helped pupils to make better progress over the last few years. To help your school continue to improve, we have asked the headteacher to concentrate on:

- making sure teaching assistants help you to be as independent as possible
- getting members of the governing body (special volunteers who help your headteacher) to come and see your lessons more often.

You can all help by making sure your teacher knows when you want to do something for yourself, without too much help.

Yours sincerely

Jon Carter
Lead inspector

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