

Samuel Laycock School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106280
Local Authority	Tameside
Inspection number	355921
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Terry Malaure
Headteacher	Mr David McIlroy
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. They observed 11 lessons and eight teachers. They held meetings with parents and carers, groups of students, governors, and staff. Meetings were also held with representatives of the local authority and some of the school's external partners. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school documentation; for example, documentation about governance and safeguarding. They examined 56 questionnaire responses from parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How well do all the different groups of students in the school achieve?
- How well does the school prepare its students to move onto college and into the world of work?
- Is the curriculum fully effective in motivating students to do their best?

Information about the school

The school provides for students with moderate learning difficulties. Nearly all are from the Tameside area. All students have a statement of special educational needs. Two-thirds are boys. About two-thirds of the students have additional learning needs, such as emotional and social difficulties, physical disabilities and those associated with the autistic spectrum condition.

A high proportion of students, about a third, are known to be eligible for free school meals. Most are from White British families, with about 15% from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The school has many national awards and accreditations. These include Healthy Schools status, Investors in People, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Sportsmark, and the ECO Schools Silver Award.

In 2011, the school is scheduled to move into new premises, on a site shared with New Charter Academy. The school was preparing for the move at the time of the 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: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Samuel Laycock is an outstanding school. It provides exceptionally well for all its students, many of whom have complex learning difficulties. They make good progress in their school work and nearly all leave for college with qualifications. Students' personal development is extremely good. They thrive in this welcoming, positive school. Its motto is, 'Happiness first, all else follows'. Parents, carers and students agree that the school is successful in realising this vision. Students feel safe and happy here. The school empowers and values each of them.

At the heart of the school's success is its outstanding care for each student. Each one is known personally by all staff. Staff are very accomplished at identifying talents that students have and in developing them into strengths and celebrating them. This is seen across the school, but is very noticeable in sport and the performing arts. The welcome for students begins at the school door, and the ethos of the school is promoted by all staff. The result of the consistent valuing and encouragement of individuals is that they grow in self-belief and confidence. Furthermore, students learn from their teachers as role models and become very supportive of each other, always ready to recognise and applaud the achievement of others.

The school provides an exciting and relevant curriculum in both key stages. In addition, imaginative enrichment opportunities involve after-school clubs and visits out of school that broaden students' horizons and challenge their thinking. Teaching is good. Relationships between staff and students are excellent and close support from teaching assistants ensures that students' learning is effective. From well-below levels of attainment on entry, students go on to achieve GCSEs at entry level. More able students achieve full GCSEs in English, mathematics and more recently, in physical education. All students move on to college when they leave school, very well prepared for their next phase of education and for employment.

Increasingly, students entering the school have not just a single learning difficulty, but several. Their additional learning needs cover a wide range of conditions, some complex. This means the challenges facing the school are changing. At present, the school has not reviewed how it will respond to the increasing demands placed on staff to maintain students' achievement and continue to provide for their well-being. Such a review is now due. The impact of the wider range of learning needs can be seen in lessons, where, at times, teachers do not meet the learning needs of all pupils. The more able, for example, could tackle more challenging work. Teaching assistants are highly effective in supporting and promoting students' learning in many situations. However, they are not always used effectively to teach groups, except in some subjects, such as in dance, or during the 'Learning to Learn' afternoons in Key Stage 3.

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The school faces an exciting future. Although it makes excellent use of its resources, the old building is cramped. The building of the new Samuel Laycock School on the same site as a new academy is well advanced. Students have played a major part in the design of the new school. The staff and governors are in an excellent position to make the most of the opportunities afforded by the new building. All aspects of leadership and management are proven and indicate an outstanding capacity to sustain further improvement. Senior managers are at the forefront of developing partnership arrangements to support the continuing progress of students and their transition into employment. Good relationships have already been established with its new partner academy. The school provides outstanding value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Review the challenges faced by the school as a result of the changing nature of the intake. Then develop and implement policies and actions that ensure the school's high quality and performance are sustained.
- Ensure the full range of students' learning needs are met by the more effective use of teaching assistants in teaching groups of students in lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Most students enter the school from mainstream primary schools. Their assessments indicate that levels of attainment on entry are low, typically at levels attained by most pupils in Key Stage 1. Records show that nearly all students, in most years and for all groups, make the progress expected of them. Very few fail to make the expected progress and a significant proportion do better than expected. By the time they are ready to leave in Year 11, virtually all students have achieved a qualification at GCSE entry level. More-able students attain full GCSEs in English, mathematics and physical education. Students also achieve accreditations in basic and life skills. Currently, all students leave to undertake further education at a number of colleges.

Students enjoy their lessons and feel very safe in school. They are generally diligent, interested and have good attitudes to work. They are keen to answer questions and get things right. Most noticeably, they are quick to praise other students and help each other. This is a very positive feature of students' personal development. Behaviour is excellent. The students' outstanding attitudes equip them very well for the world of work, since they display qualities that employers value, such as a willingness to work, engage and learn.

Students take a keen interest in healthy food and physical education is a strength of the school. The level of exercise is high for all, whether through sport or through dance. The school has had great success in developing the prowess of individual students in a wide range of competitive sports, to national level. Many of the students who achieve such success remain well-grounded young people, willing to help others develop their skills and to mentor them. In ways such as this, students make a powerful contribution to their school community. They have been closely involved in the design of the new building, impressing the new school's architects. Through lessons and through a range of visits the school challenges students' thinking about their personal values, morality, and social and cultural matters that affect them and others. Students respond exceptionally well, to the degree that they strongly affect the people they visit. In a recent visit to a homeless

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shelter, the residents made a presentation to the students when they left, in appreciation of the interest they had shown in them.

There have been a number of fixed-term exclusions and attendance only appears to be at average levels. Inspectors found that the exclusions were for a small number of students facing extreme difficulties. At no point did staff and governors stop supporting the young people. The absence figures include a number of unavoidable absences for those students with serious medical conditions. Factoring out those absences shows attendance to be very good. Parents were clear that their children loved coming to school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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

How effective is the provision?

The highest quality of care and a curriculum full of interest are central to the school's aims. It achieves both. Leaders and staff at all levels show a very strong commitment to the students and their well-being. The school has a very stable staff, highly experienced in caring for young people with learning difficulties. Through daily briefings, all staff know of students' achievements and who to look out for. This has a powerful impact on the ethos of the school, as staff may pass time with students even though they may not be directly involved in teaching or supporting them. Lessons and conversations between staff and students are full of good humour. The quality of preparation for transition to college and for life beyond school illustrates the effectiveness of care, support and guidance well. The school works closely with Connexions, the local college and other partners to ensure good

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quality work experience, appropriate advice and guidance, and, more recently, to ensure that student's college courses begin at the levels they achieved on leaving school, with no slippage.

The National Curriculum is the basis of the curriculum in Key Stage 3. There is an appropriate focus on the core subjects of English, especially reading, mathematics and science, and the core skill of using information and communication technology. In Key Stage 4 the focus changes to preparation for the future, and students mix day-release to college, work experience, and learning life skills with preparation for examination courses. Citizenship and life skills are taught throughout. There is an extensive range of visits out of school which serve the dual purpose of promoting students' independence and communication skills and also challenges their thinking. Residential stays and a range of after-school clubs contribute towards the outstanding enrichment opportunities. A more thematic, cross-curricular approach to learning is developing in both key stages. These developments involve teachers in roles other than their normal subject roles and teaching assistants in leading roles. The sessions are very popular with students.

The school has addressed the issue of improving marking left from the previous inspection. Much better assessment data are now available to teachers and managers, and they involve students more in reviewing their progress. Teaching is good and some teaching of outstanding quality was seen. Lessons are often practical and successfully develop core skills. Relationships between staff and students are excellent and teaching assistants play an effective supporting role in lessons. However, such is the wide range of ability in each class, exacerbated by the high number of students with additional needs, that teachers do not always match the work accurately for all individuals. When this was done successfully, it was usually when the teaching assistants were actively involved in teaching, often taking small groups under the direction of the class teacher. It was usually less successful when the teacher attempted to teach the class together.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's clear, simple vision has united the school in a common purpose and direction. In its focus on meeting the all-round needs of each student the school is naturally inclusive and strongly promotes equal opportunities. Safeguarding arrangements are good. There are high expectations of students and a track record of achievements in many areas, not just academic. They are all celebrated. Senior staff are empowered. This is an outward-looking and innovative school, closely involved at the forefront of developments in the curriculum and in transitions to work and further education.

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The governing body provides good leadership. Governors are supportive and challenging, and hold the school to account for its performance. They are well informed, well organised in committees and involved in the school's strategic development through rigorous and frequent self-evaluation. However, the school's intake is changing rapidly. At the time of the previous inspection, in 2008, one-third of students had additional learning needs. This figure is now two-thirds, so the range of needs of students entering the school now in Year 7 is much broader than that of the students in Year 11. This is one of the reasons why teaching in lessons does not always meet the needs of all students. Governors and staff have not yet prepared their response to students' changing needs and this is becoming a priority.

The school's partnerships with schools, colleges, external agencies, the local authority and many other organisations are first class and it has a very good partnership with parents and carers. The school promotes community cohesion exceptionally well. This is seen clearly within the school community, where students with a wide range of learning needs work and play together in harmony. The local and European visits made by students broaden their outlook and challenge stereotypes, as in visits to Liverpool to see the Museum of Slavery and to Europe to see the D-Day memorials and Anne Frank's house.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Virtually all parents and carers who responded to the parents' questionnaire expressed a high degree of confidence in the school and acknowledgement of what it achieves. Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors made it clear how important it was for them that their child was happy at school. In this respect all parents and carers who responded agreed their children enjoyed school. Individual comments were made by a few parents and carers. Although small in number, some parents and carers felt their children were not

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making sufficient progress and some felt that their children were not prepared well enough for the future. Inspectors found students made good progress in their school work and outstanding progress in their personal development. The school also prepared children for life beyond school exceptionally well.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Samuel Laycock 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 56 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 104 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	39	70	17	30	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	37	66	19	34	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	40	71	15	27	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	52	22	39	4	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	42	75	13	23	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	59	21	38	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	57	22	39	0	0	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)	30	54	21	38	3	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	35	63	20	36	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	32	57	23	41	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	48	27	48	2	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	36	64	19	34	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	41	73	14	25	1	2	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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



10 December 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Samuel Laycock School, Stalybridge, SK15 1JF

You may remember I visited your school recently, with Mrs Ward, to carry out an inspection. As promised to a group of Year 11 students I spoke to, I am writing to tell you the outcome of the inspection. I would like to say thank you to all the students we talked to and observed during lessons. Listening to what you told us helped us come to our judgements.

We judge your school to be outstanding. Along with your parents and carers, we think the school is excellent in all the main areas we examine: how much you achieve, how well the school provides for you, and how well it is placed to become even better. It seemed to us that every member of staff wanted you to do your best. No matter where we went, staff and students were sharing 'high fives' to celebrate something good a student had achieved. Your school has very limited space, but everywhere there is exciting work going on. I know you are looking forward to moving into your new building during 2011. I felt a little sad that some of you who have helped so much in the designing of the new school will have left by then. However, knowing the school never forgets its past students, I'm sure those in Year 11 will be invited back as special guests to see it.

The full report gives your parents details of the many good and excellent things we saw. They will probably not be surprised at how positive the report is because your parents are some of the biggest fans the school has. It is very important to them that they have a school where they can be confident you will be happy, cared for and where you can achieve your potential. But there is something I would like to add. That is how lucky the staff feel to work with you. Many of the staff told us that they would not want to work anywhere else, and part of that is because you, the students, are a pleasure to teach. So have a 'high five' on us!

Mr McIlroy and his staff never stop trying to help improve your learning. One of our jobs is to help him do this by bringing an outside perspective to the work of the school. We noticed two things. We saw that many of you have not just one but several difficulties that might stop you learning well. Steadily, over the years, the number of students with complex needs is growing. This is bringing new challenges to the school. We think it is a good time for the staff and governors to review what is needed to make sure the school remains as successful as it is now. Second, we could see in lessons how difficult it was for teachers to meet the wide range of learning needs of the students in each class. When we saw how capable your teaching assistants are, we thought they are the ones to help your teachers. We suggest they become more involved in teaching you.

I hope these suggestions help. On behalf of Mrs Ward and myself, I wish you all the best for your futures.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett

Her Majesty's Inspector

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