

Pathfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113638
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	357382
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Charles Hackett

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	116
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeanette Kemlo
Headteacher	Claire May
Date of previous school inspection	12 February 2008
School address	Abbey Road Pilton Barnstaple EX31 1JU
Telephone number	01271 342423
Fax number	01271 323252
Email address	admin@pathfield.devon.sch.uk

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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 13 lessons, seeing 12 teachers, and observed teaching for all age groups. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at lesson planning, data on pupils' achievements, a range of school policies and the school development plan. The responses from 47 parent and carer questionnaires were considered.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the school's work. They looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well the school tracks the rates of progress of different groups of pupils.
- Whether the curriculum for pupils in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form challenge pupils and offer age-appropriate opportunities.
- The key qualities of teaching that ensure it is effective for pupils with different special educational needs.
- The effectiveness of the strategies used to manage behaviour, including that of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders with challenging behaviour.

Information about the school

Pathfield is a school for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Their cognitive abilities are so severely restricted that attainment will never rise above low. Many pupils also have autistic spectrum disorders, some with challenging behaviour. The school has specialist status for communication and interaction. It has recently achieved the Healthy Schools Plus award. The headteacher and two other members of the senior management team have been appointed within the last 18 months.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Pathfield is a good school where the welfare of each individual pupil is given a very high priority. Effective and robust systems are in place to ensure that pupils learn how to be healthy and safe in and out of school. All pupils have detailed care plans created when they join the school. These include rigorous risk assessments and, where needed, behaviour management and moving and handling plans. During the inspection, very effective use of these to support each pupil was observed. Behaviour management strategies were particularly effective for those pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and challenging behaviour. On a few occasions, staff, in seeking to do as much as possible to enable all pupils to achieve, over-support them, thus reducing pupils' opportunities to act independently.

Staff work very closely with parents and carers. The success of this is reflected in the overwhelmingly positive comments of parents and carers in the Ofsted questionnaire. Links with other agencies are excellent and result in therapists, medical staff and social services staff working very closely with school staff. This ensures that there is continuity in the application of individual support programmes for pupils and their education is not constantly being disrupted by them having to attend off-site appointments.

Pupils make good progress. This was evident in almost all the lessons observed and by the recently introduced rigorous process of collecting data on their achievements. This data shows that progress is similar for different cohorts and pupils with different special educational needs. Where a few pupils seem not be making such good progress, appropriate interventions are put in place to support this. Progress is also good in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and excellent in the sixth form.

Teaching is effective because of the clear focus on addressing pupils' individual needs and the efforts made to enable them to enjoy learning. The specialist status of the school in communication and interaction is promoted very well in all lessons through the setting of targets for each pupil in these aspects in each subject. In a few lessons observed, pupils made less progress because the planning for the lesson did not fully show how engaging in the activities would impact on pupils' learning and progress. The curriculum is particularly effective in preparing pupils for their well-planned destinations after leaving school. Work in lessons is very well supplemented by pupils being involved in a wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs. Music is a strong feature of these activities, and the achievements of the school choir are significantly noteworthy.

The headteacher and the senior team have had a significant impact on improving the quality of the school's provision since its previous inspection. Together with a strong governing body, they have shown drive and ambition in enhancing the school's effectiveness. Following a comprehensive and thorough self-evaluation audit, they have

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introduced rigorous processes to bring about many improvements. The effectiveness of these actions shows that the school has a good capacity to sustain its improvements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the planning for all lessons clearly shows what pupils will learn as a result of their participation in the activities.
- Ensure that throughout the school there is a consistent expectation of staff to allow pupils to be as independent as possible.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy learning in a wide range of subject areas. For example, a secondary group with autistic spectrum disorders thoroughly enjoyed singing and playing in a music lesson. They worked together very well, waiting for their turn and accepting the contribution of others. In another secondary lesson designed to encourage pupils to ride bicycles (Bikeability), pupils' enjoyment was reflected in their enthusiasm, hard work and readiness to follow the instructions of staff. It is only when, in the few lessons where planning is less effective, that pupils' progress slows.

Different groups of pupils make similarly good progress. Older pupils' progress is reflected in the achievement of different forms of external accreditation, including Foundation level awards, and in their ability to undertake work-related placements.

Behaviour is good and this helps create a positive learning atmosphere throughout the school. Pupils' smiling faces and readiness to follow staff directions clearly show that they feel safe in and out of school. Their above average attendance supports this even further. Pupils show respect for each other and enjoy working with each other in lessons. For example, in a lesson for older pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, the pupils clearly enjoyed responding to the different sounds they were asked to recognise. Pupils make a strong contribution to the life of the school. The school council is very prominent, meeting regularly and making important suggestions to develop aspects of the school. For example, the school council has been fully involved in the design of the new playground.

Pupils' excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles is shown by their involvement in running the healthy snacks bar and their eagerness to engage in physical activities. A strong focus is put on preparing pupils for life after school and thus supporting their future economic well-being. Students in the sixth form enjoy the benefits of a very well-planned curriculum to take part in a wide range of community-based activities. These arrangements enable students' transitions to college, sheltered employment or work training providers to be very smooth.

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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	
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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teachers and teaching assistants combine well in most of the teaching to meet pupils' different needs. ♦ For example, in an excellent Key Stage 1 mathematics lesson, the teacher and teaching assistants worked effectively with pupils individually or in pairs on the different tasks set according to the ability levels of pupils. Teachers seek to make the lessons interesting for all pupils and use a wide variety of resources to stimulate learning. Pupils in a Key Stage 2 group enjoyed looking closely at snails and sharing their thoughts on how they move. They shared a microscope to closely examine them and, from their responses at the end of the lesson, it was clear that they had learnt a lot about their characteristics. Excellent examples of lesson planning were seen where it was very clear how activities are planned linked to the individual improvement targets for each pupil in the class. This, however, is not always consistent in all lessons.

The curriculum has a good balance between coverage of expected subject areas and specialist courses designed to meet pupils' specific needs. Although pupils need to focus on basic skills, this is done in very age-appropriate ways. There is a strong focus on personal and social education and activities such as horse-riding and the 'Bikeability' programme. The development of pupils' communication and interaction skills is emphasised strongly throughout the curriculum and in the teaching of all subjects

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throughout the school. The curriculum for Key Stage 4 pupils integrates very well with that for students in the sixth form. Good plans exist to extend the curriculum further by increasing the opportunities to gain external accreditation.

Pathfield staff give very careful attention to ensuring that the intimate care needs of pupils are met in a way that gives all pupils dignity and respect. Daily routines are secure and this ensures that pupils are relaxed in school, knowing that support is close at hand. Individual education plans and the care plans focus on the individual needs of each pupil, and targets are set based on these. These are challenging and monitored closely by staff. Pupils' behaviour is managed well, including that of those with challenging behaviour. Staff use the excellent partnerships that exist with staff from other agencies to support the care needs of pupils very effectively. In supporting pupils to achieve and take part in activities, on a few occasions, staff do not always wait long enough to allow the pupil to complete the task independently.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior staff team, with good support from the governing body, have achieved a great deal in a relatively short period of time. Robust self-evaluation has identified weaknesses. Much has been done to address these and led to improvements such as in the processes for tracking pupils' progress, developing the specialist teaching skills of staff and the quality of provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. These improvements and the detailed plans for further development give the school strong momentum to improve further.

Senior staff have taken the staff team with them, developing a high level of professionalism and teamwork, which has led to a shared belief in the vision for the school's development. The governing body play an importantly role in supporting the school and monitoring its effectiveness. The positive links between teachers, teaching assistants, therapists and nurses enhance the effectiveness of the school even further. This enhancement of the quality of the school's provision and the good progress pupils make show that all pupils have equal opportunities to achieve and no form of discrimination is tolerated.

Safeguarding is given a high priority. The governing body and senior staff have undertaken safe recruiting training and all staff received regular child protection training. Stringent policies and procedures are in place that are reviewed and amended as required on a regular basis.

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There has been a strong emphasis placed on promoting community cohesion and pupils respond by working well together in school. A detailed audit has led to an effective action plan being put in place. This is already extending the opportunities pupils have to understand aspects of the local community and further work is planned to enhance involvement at a national level.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The children in the Early Years Foundation Stage enjoy a good start to their school lives. Children enjoy being in school, quickly making friends through the importance placed on developing their skills at playing. Daily improvement targets are set and the achievement of these, alongside those within their individual education plans, confirms that the children make good progress. Staff record children's achievements but have identified the need to improve their systems for doing this.

The curriculum and style of teaching are very appropriate for this age group. The indoor learning area supports their development very well. It is very well set out, maximising the space available, in clearly differentiated work areas to meet the range of special educational needs within the group. The outside area has recently been carefully redeveloped and new equipment is now on order, as the school has identified the need to further improve this area.

The provision is led and managed effectively. The good links with parents and carers and the rigorous safeguarding procedures ensure that the individual care needs of all children are met. Staff work together very well with real purpose to have a positive impact on the lives of the children.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

The sixth form provides students with an excellent extension to their education at the school. The curriculum is very age-appropriate and is based on the personal needs and choices of the students. It has a core structure that covers the three areas of vocational learning, personal and social skills and functional skills. Students, with support, choose their areas of focus and individual programmes are established. The excellent progress students make means that when they leave Pathfield, they have gained some forms of external accreditation, and enjoyed vocational learning experiences.

Students clearly enjoy the environments of both the transition class based in school and the teaching base in a building off-site. The key strength of the excellent curriculum is that it challenges students within real-life settings whenever possible. Activities, such as the regular weekly task of carrying out shopping for some local older people, ensure students are out in the community performing tasks that have a real purpose.

The sixth form is very well led and managed by staff determined to secure the best possible provision for the students. They ensure that teaching is of a very high standard and that all staff who work with the students have a clear understanding of their preferred communication strategies, as well as their personal care needs.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

There was a high response from parents and carers in completing the Ofsted questionnaire for the inspection, with nearly half sending in completed responses. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school. They stress how they feel their children are safe and happy in school. 'My child is extremely happy at

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school and loves to go' and 'All staff are fantastic and the children really enjoy it there' are typical of the comments made by parents and carers.

Parents and carers feel that communication between school and home is very good. As one parent or carer put it: 'Parents are included and informed how your child is doing.' A very few parents and carers had some medical concerns. Inspectors passed on these concerns to the school, but concluded that they were not the school's responsibility.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Pathfield 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 47 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 116 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	80	8	17	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	41	87	6	13	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	33	70	13	28	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	60	15	32	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	34	72	10	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	64	14	30	3	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	66	11	23	1	2	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	64	13	28	2	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	79	7	15	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	64	14	30	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	64	12	26	3	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	33	70	11	23	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	36	77	10	21	0	0	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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pathfield School, Barnstaple EX31 1JU

Thank you for making Mrs Wright and me so very welcome when we recently came into school. We really enjoyed meeting you all. I know some of you will not be able to read and understand this letter but I hope your parents, carers or staff will help you.

We have judged your school to be good. From your responses to the questionnaire, we know you and your parents and carers agree with this. We can see you enjoy school and are very safe. You work and behave very well in lessons and out of school on activities. Those of you in the sixth form do some wonderful things in the community, such as shopping for the older people who live near you.

We can see that the headteacher and her senior colleagues lead and manage the school really well. All the staff support this and this makes the school such a bright and busy place. We have suggested just two things to make the school even better.

- Make sure all the planning for lessons shows what you will learn when you undertake activities.
- Ask the staff to think how they could do even more to encourage you to be as independent as possible.

Once again thank you so much for being so friendly and helpful.

Keep working hard.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett Lead inspector

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