

Old Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104274
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	355551
Inspection dates	30–31 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Patricia Potheary

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clare Laird
Headteacher	Nigel Smith
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors who observed 13 lessons, taught by nine different teachers. Meetings were held with staff and the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspectors observed the school's work, looked at information about pupils' progress, staff surveys and safeguarding procedures. They analysed 22 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- It looked at the rate of progress for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders compared to their peers.
- It looked at the effectiveness of the use of assessment in lessons and the impact of leadership in increasing progress for different groups.
- It looked at the balance of time allocated to different areas of the curriculum.
- It looked at the effectiveness of governors in monitoring, evaluating and challenging the work of the school.

Information about the school

This is a small special school. A higher-than-average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Just over half of all pupils are of Asian origin, mainly Pakistani and just under half are from White British backgrounds. A few pupils speak English as an additional language. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties, with just under half of these having additional, autistic spectrum disorders. Just over one third of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties. The school has recently achieved the International Schools Award and Healthy Schools Award. There has been a significant reduction in staffing at all levels of the school since the last inspection, due to falling rolls. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are accommodated together in a suite of rooms within the school.

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

This is a good school. Pupils achieve well in their subjects and their personal development is outstanding. The school's very attractive, lively environment supports this harmonious and purposeful learning community strongly. As a result, pupils enjoy school very much, laughter and delight being evident throughout the day. High-quality teamwork by all staff, who are committed to supporting every pupil in the school, ensures a family atmosphere in which pupils feel exceptionally safe and happy. The resulting care, guidance and support are outstanding. Provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage are consistently outstanding and provide an excellent start to school life for the children attending.

Pupils make good progress, especially in literacy, numeracy and communication skills. All groups of pupils make equally good progress overall, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, the more-able and those with autistic spectrum disorders. Significant progress is made also by pupils in becoming more mobile, in adapting their behaviour and in learning to become more independent in their daily activities.

Teaching by all staff is skilled, with dedicated, seamless teamwork, a wide variety of well-organised activities and good use of technology to help pupils understand. The improved use of assessment to set the next steps in learning, for every individual, ensures that most lessons do meet all needs. As a result, progress has increased for some groups. In a few lessons, assessment is not always used effectively to set targets and plan a range of work which is challenging enough for one or two of the most able.

The good curriculum is rich in interesting activities, including donkey riding, sailing and Banghra dancing, to engage pupils. This wide range of experiences has supported outstanding behaviour, where pupils are enthusiastic and highly motivated to learn. Skilled, specialist approaches for including pupils with very different needs, ensure good progress is made in literacy and numeracy. Nevertheless, too little time is spent on structured, subject-focused learning and the time allocated to daily care routines and personal and social skills lacks balance. The school recognises this and is looking to increase the time spent applying basic skills and exploring other subjects each day.

Excellent care is taken to liaise with other agencies and parents and carers to ensure individual pupils' specific needs and difficulties are securely addressed. As one parent commented, 'The support is always there when needed.' Outstanding work to encourage healthy living, reflected in the Healthy Schools Award, has ensured that pupils take plenty of exercise and enjoy a very healthy diet. There is an especially strong spiritual dimension to the work of the school, whereby pupils are keenly aware of the wonders around them. The achievement of all, regardless of ability or any other difference, is deeply respected and celebrated by pupils.

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The governing body brings a wide range of suitable skills to its work and ensures that statutory duties are met. It holds the school to account, but lacks sufficient information and training to carry out its role more effectively. It has no clear procedures for evaluating policies regularly or for providing stronger challenge regarding the school's work. School leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and of what needs to be improved, resulting from good-quality self-evaluation. This is based upon detailed information about each pupil's progress, which is regularly monitored. There is a successful drive for continuous improvement; for example, the progress pupils make in communication skills has been increased recently. The capacity to sustain improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the way the curriculum and assessment support learning by:
 - improving the balance of teaching time so that more time is spent in structured, subject focused activities
 - ensuring that every pupil, in each lesson, is challenged fully by the type of work provided.
- Ensure that the governing body has enough information and training to monitor and evaluate policies effectively and to provide a stronger level of challenge regarding the school's work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

In all lessons, pupils are focused well on the activities, clearly enjoy their learning and try hard to do their best, which is why achievement is good ? a fact reflected in parents' and carers' views. In one lesson, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties sustained their attention for a remarkable length of time, while staff helped them expertly to experience rain and running water. In English particularly and also in mathematics, although progress is good overall, a significant group of pupils make outstanding progress, especially in communication, speaking and listening. There is no significant difference in progress between any groups in the school, regardless of ethnicity, gender, special need or ability. In a lesson to teach letter sounds, pupils, with severe autistic spectrum disorders worked together very well; the sense of community and calm enjoyment was exceptional. Pupils are confident to use computers and several show excellent progress in being able to work independently.

The good contribution pupils make to the school and wider community includes collecting litter locally, raising money for several charities, representing the school with a signing choir and by showing support and care for each other regularly. The school council is very active, influencing the school uniform and school signs, for example. Attendance is broadly average, when essential absences for severe medical needs are taken into account. Pupils' good preparation for the future includes their rapidly developing basic skills, their ability to accept and accommodate the needs of others and the way they work so well with each other and adults.

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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	1
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	3
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

* 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?

The school environment is of the highest quality, from the attractive, welcoming and well-equipped playground areas to the careful inclusion of signposting for visually impaired pupils. Each classroom has inviting areas for pupils to learn in different ways, such as sensory and light rooms. Classrooms provide a wealth of imaginative resources which are adapted well to the different needs of pupils in each group. Lessons are typified by trusting, warm relationships, which enable pupils to learn. Rigorous assessment and detailed planning mean that each staff member is secure in understanding what each pupil needs to do to move to the next level. The resulting teamwork is often outstanding. Despite this, in a few lessons, assessment is not used well to plan work that moves on rapidly enough for one or two of the more-able. Skilled use of specialist approaches leads to some very good engagement from pupils with more profound difficulties and exceptionally good social responses from those who have autistic spectrum disorders. Regular visits, visitors and projects enable pupils to gain a wider understanding of the world around them. From the moment pupils arrive until they leave, time is used very effectively to support their personal needs, mobility and independence skills. Nevertheless, opportunities are missed to plan to develop these skills within a stronger, more creative, subject-based framework. As a result, lesson time is too short each day and breaks and

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other activities take too long and the curriculum lacks balance. This means that pupils miss opportunities to practise and apply some of the academic skills they will need in the future, especially in numeracy and information and communication technology. Very strong care and guidance includes very effective arrangements when pupils join or leave the school, excellent support for those most in need, and clear improvements secured in attendance and behaviour where necessary.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a strongly shared vision among school leaders and all staff, centred on securing high-quality learning and well-being for pupils. Regular training, to bring benefits from new initiatives, improves provision constantly. The improvement ensures that the rate of pupils' progress is accelerated. For example, better systems for assessing pupils have led to more effective teaching and learning and so an increasing number of lessons are found to be good or outstanding. The collection of information about pupils' progress is very regularly monitored and analysed and supports this work well. The governing body is well organised and knows and understands the main strengths and weaknesses of the school. It is not involved sufficiently in evaluating policies and does not challenge the work of the school sufficiently. This is, in part, because the governing body lacks sufficient training, but also because it does not have access to a clear overview of progress for different groups to help it with this work.

The good promotion of equal opportunities is to be seen throughout the school day, as staff strive to ensure no group is left behind and all are included. Any gaps between different groups in enjoyment and achievement have been systematically reduced. There is no evidence of any discrimination. Efficient safeguarding procedures include regular effective training for all staff and strong working partnerships with other agencies to ensure no harm comes to those at risk. The school's promotion of community cohesion has not yet developed fully, but is strong with regard to international issues and includes the recently awarded International Schools Award. Cohesion of the community within school and with some local connections is good.

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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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
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

High-quality links with parents and carers ensure a smooth start in the Nursery and Reception Year. The progress made by children is outstanding, with most children making more than three years progress in two years, with very strong gains made in all the areas of learning. Outstanding teaching is typified by a wealth of energetic, enthusiastic activities to bring learning to life. In one very successful lesson, children joined in joyfully with a song about counting chicks, helped to clear up responsibly and took turns maturely. The outside area is beautifully designed and used to the full in helping children explore their environment; growing plants, or finding insects are among many examples. The excellent curriculum includes regular initiatives to enhance learning and access. Most recently, a brightly coloured number line was introduced, which is helping children with visual impairment to count more easily. Intensive, highly skilled phonics work has helped several children to begin to learn to read. In one very well-organised and highly motivating session using cake mixture, one child was helped expertly to overcome his dislike of touching new things. Inspirational leadership and robust assessment have ensured that all staff share high expectations of what can be achieved and have directed improvements strongly to already outstanding outcomes. Most recently, this has included improvements to children's numeracy and communication skills and more effective management of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is at the forefront of sharing practice and developing provision in the local authority.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

A higher-than-average proportion of parents and carers completed the questionnaire and they were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school. They like particularly the way their children enjoy school, how safe their children are and how well they are informed about their children's progress. Several parents and carers made positive comments, including, 'The support is always there when needed' and 'In all our dealings with the school, we have found every member of staff to be professional, knowledgeable and very friendly.' There were no comments expressing concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Old Hall 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 22 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 53 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	19	86	3	14	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	20	91	2	9	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	20	91	0	0	2	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	64	8	36	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	82	32	14	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	82	2	9	2	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	82	4	18	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)	5	68	5	23	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	17	77	5	23	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	82	1	5	2	9	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	77	3	14	2	9	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	17	77	5	23	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	17	77	5	23	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.



1 April 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Old Hall School, Walsall WS2 7LU

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you very much, joining you for lunch and seeing some of your lessons. Yours is a good school. There are many interesting things going on; riding donkeys, sailing and playtime are just a few we saw or heard about. Your teachers work hard to help you and your work is getting better and better.

Enjoyable teaching helps you to make good progress in your lessons and we like the way you always try to do your best. We have asked your school to give you more time to spend in lessons and to make sure that lessons always provide enough work at the right level for those of you who learn quickly. We would also like the governing body to play an even bigger role in the school's work.

We are sure that you will talk about these ideas with your teachers and help them by doing your very best. The way you help each other and enjoy school is very impressive and your behaviour is some of the best we have seen. This is why your school is such a happy and welcoming place to be.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Potheary

Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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