

# Fox Wood Special School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111496
<b>Local Authority</b>	Warrington
<b>Inspection number</b>	356923
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	John Rutherford HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	63
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	12
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Debbie Holding
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Karen Nicholls
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 September 2007
<b>School address</b>	Chatfield Drive Birchwood, Warrington Cheshire WA3 6QW
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 16 lessons taught by 15 teachers and higher level teaching assistants. They held meetings with school leaders, groups of pupils with their support staff, three members of the governing body and a group of seven parents and carers. Inspectors analysed records of pupils' achievement, progress data and a range of school management documents, including policies and records for ensuring the safeguarding of pupils. They analysed completed inspection questionnaires from 30 parents and carers.

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

- The use of assessment by school leaders and teachers to plan work that helps pupils to improve their achievement.
- The impact of the school's communication and interaction specialism in helping pupils to achieve more.
- The contribution of leaders at all levels to improving provision and pupils' achievements.

## Information about the school

This school provides education and care for pupils who have a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Around a fifth of the pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), a third have severe learning difficulties (SLD) and a half have an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) as well as SLD. Approximately a quarter of these pupils have significant medical needs and over a third have a visual and/or a hearing impairment. A third of the pupils are known to be eligible for a free school meal, which is above average, and a very small number of pupils are from a minority ethnic background. The pupils live at some distance from the school and are transported each day by bus or taxi.

The school has received the Investors in People award and a wide range of awards for their quality of provision in basic skills, arts, sports, healthy living, careers guidance, and information and communication technology (ICT). The school is in the final stages of preparing for accreditation by the National Autistic Society. In September 2010 the school was awarded specialist status in Communication and Interaction. Within the local authority the school is a centre of excellence for managing challenging behaviour and the positive and safe handling of pupils. It also provides outreach support for pupils with complex medical needs. A new headteacher was appointed shortly before the inspection, in April 2011. The school has extended provision. This is inspected separately by Ofsted and the report can be found on the Ofsted website.

**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

This school provides an outstanding quality of education and care for the pupils. One parent summed up most of the comments received by inspectors when saying, "The staff are fantastic; they support not only our children but us as families and there are always happy faces throughout the school". Inspectors saw 'happy faces' because the quality of care and the curriculum are exceptional; therefore, pupils feel very secure, comfortable and stimulated. Pupils are making outstanding progress in their personal development, particularly in their understanding of healthy living, how to manage their own behaviour and how they can contribute to important decisions about their life. The work done by the school as part of its Communication and Interaction specialism enables pupils to make outstanding progress in their social development.

Pupils make good progress in English, mathematics, science and ICT in relation to their age and individual starting points. The majority gain a college place when they leave at the age of 19 years. This is because the quality of teaching is good overall, ranging from satisfactory to outstanding. There is a consistency across the school in the way staff use effective methods for enhancing communication with pupils. These involve a wide range of equipment, from 'low technology' symbols to 'high technology' electronic equipment, according to pupils' needs. Pupils respond very well to these approaches and this contributes to their good participation and pace of learning in most lessons. Teaching is well adapted to meet the individual needs of pupils in most classes. Where this is not the case it is because there is some lack of consistency in using the school's system for assessing and recording pupils' achievements in lessons to inform future planning. This lack of consistency is partly a result of school leaders not emphasising pupils' outcomes in their criteria for evaluating the impact of teaching when they are monitoring lessons.

The outstanding leadership of the new headteacher and senior leaders promotes excellent teamwork amongst all staff in combining education and care to provide the best experience possible for pupils. A very strong and committed governing body has a detailed understanding of the work of the school and makes an invaluable contribution to the school's strategic planning. School leaders systematically compare and evaluate the school's performance against a wide range of national data and the performance of other schools, both locally and further afield. As a result, they have recently increased the challenge in their targets for pupils' achievement. Their progress so far demonstrates an outstanding capacity to achieve them.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To improve learning and progress to the same outstanding level as other outcomes, the school should adopt a more thorough and consistent approach to recording and analysing pupils' achievements and using this to inform future planning.

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## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**1**

Due to the severity and complexity of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities, it is inappropriate to judge the extent to which they meet national standards of attainment. From starting points that are often at the earliest stages of development and learning the majority of pupils make good progress towards their personal targets. The school carries out a considerable amount of external benchmarking to ensure that each pupil has the most challenging target possible. Pupils with ASD and SLD make good progress in writing words independently and learning letters and their sounds; some can read simple sentences. They can sort foods into groups and make their own choices of ingredients for a fruit drink. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage can play purposefully and independently, and they are developing a good understanding of how to use a book. Pupils with PMLD enjoy learning and they make appropriate responses to the wide range of stimuli used to engage all their senses. With this approach younger pupils can understand a story about bathing a dog and older pupils can learn about the months of the year and the sequence of the seasons.

Pupils enjoy school very much, though this is not fully reflected in overall attendance figures, which are broadly average. The difference is not fully explained by pupils' medical needs and there is some unauthorised absence for holidays in term-time which the school is working hard to reduce. Pupils' behaviour is excellent overall. They settle down well in lessons and are very courteous to visitors. Those who are susceptible to 'outbursts' respond very well to the teaching of self-control and the majority soon learn to recover themselves with the minimum of adult intervention. These personal qualities and their progress in learning basic skills give pupils a good preparation for their life after school. Pupils indicate that they feel very safe in school and their parents and carers strongly agree. Parents and carers particularly appreciate the opportunities that staff provide for their children to experience the thrill of risky situations in a very safe context when they visit outdoor adventure centres. They have a very good understanding of the healthy foods they need to eat and they enjoy taking exercise in physical education lessons and extra-curricular activities.

Pupils are making exceptional progress in learning how to make a contribution to the community beyond school. They participate fully in local Youth Parliament activities and learn much about democracy; they join pupils from the nearby high school in discussing how to protect the environment and they take an active part in community fundraising projects. Pupils' excellent social development is seen in the number of friends they have, both in Fox Wood and in other schools. They gain a very balanced and accurate view of the lives of children in other countries from well-planned multi-cultural experiences in the curriculum.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	3
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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?

Most teachers have high expectations for what pupils can do and they challenge them to work independently and to make choices. Lessons provide stimulating and interesting activities, often linked to pupils' everyday lives, and these help to make pupils enthusiastic about learning. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together, using a wide range of communication aids, to ensure that that every pupil is fully engaged in learning. They make very imaginative use of commercial and 'home-made' equipment to stimulate pupils with PMLD to learn new skills. Lessons end with a very good review session during which teachers reinforce each pupil's new learning while assessing what they need to concentrate on next. Teachers devise challenging individual targets for all pupils and there is a clear system for assessing and recording each pupil's progress towards these targets as a basis for planning future lessons. However, this system is not used with the same effectiveness in every class; therefore, activities are not always as well matched to the needs of the pupils as they could be.

An exceptional curriculum gives pupils a wide range of stimulating experiences, both in school and when out of school on interesting and adventurous trips. At the moment, pupils are particularly interested in the produce from their own vegetable garden and this has formed the basis of a considerable amount of work on food technology, healthy eating

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and self-help in preparing meals. These activities help pupils to improve their numeracy, literacy and speaking skills. Information and communication technology is being used effectively to support learning across the curriculum, although the school is rightly seeking to enhance this work by improving their equipment. Well-planned enrichment activities provide a very good breadth to pupils' experience including, for example, music, book-making, yoga, drama and rebound therapy. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage receive a curriculum that is appropriate to their age and needs, with access to all the recommended areas of learning and development.

The school has an excellent partnership with health and other support services in providing the very best care for the pupils on a continuous basis. No matter how severe the medical needs of pupils, nurses ensure that they can participate fully in the same enjoyable learning activities as all pupils. All pupils have their own very clear individual education, behaviour or health plans. These form a very useful basis for the day-to-day planning of pupils' learning and care and for the assessment of their progress. These plans are reviewed and updated on a frequent basis.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## How effective are leadership and management?

Senior and middle leaders provide a strong driving force in ensuring consistency in the way pupils are taught and cared for across the school. A particular strength is their systematic approach to the professional development of all staff. A very good example of this is how communication and interaction training has resulted in all staff effectively using the same approaches throughout the school, and this has made a significant contribution to pupils' achievement and social development.

Senior leaders and members of the governing body systematically and rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of the school to inform their improvement plans. They enable middle leaders to be involved in this work, thereby helping them to improve their leadership skills and to increase the capacity of the school to keep improving. Improvement plans are suitably ambitious and very manageable; however, they are not always clear about which aspects of pupils' outcomes they are intending to improve or how they will know when they have succeeded in this. Senior leaders and governors work well together in ensuring that all the requirements for safeguarding pupils are met rigorously. The safe use of computers is built into the curriculum and many staff are well trained in the safe and positive handling of pupils.

Fox Wood benefits from its excellent partnerships with other schools by having increased opportunities to benchmark performance and to access a wider range of learning

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experiences for pupils. They also contribute a considerable amount to their partner schools in line with their specialist status, particularly by providing training in effective communication and interaction with challenging pupils, including behaviour management and safe and positive handling approaches. Responses from partner schools show that this support is very valuable to them.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is integral to all of its work rather than being strategically planned. The school itself provides a very cohesive community in which pupils with a wide range of different needs learn together happily. Joint activities with pupils in mainstream schools are judged by both partners to make a strong contribution to an inclusive and cohesive community. Staff work very hard and imaginatively to ensure that there are no barriers to any pupil's equal opportunity to participate and achieve well in the sorts of activities that all children and young people enjoy, whether it is learning literacy and numeracy skills, kayaking or having a family holiday in the school's specially adapted caravan in the Lake District.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

There are only three children under five years of age and they are educated in Key Stage 1 classes. Judgements on their provision and outcomes are therefore part of the main report.



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*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
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

## Sixth form

Students make good progress in acquiring new skills and excellent progress in applying what they already know to a wide range of new contexts, such as enterprise activities, vocational learning and work experience. All students leave with a nationally accredited qualification and the school continuously reviews these to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging to motivate students. On leaving, the majority of students go on to attend a college. Students are keen to contribute to their school community, for example, by organising the end-of-term summer ball. They also form very supportive relationships with younger pupils and are happy to accept responsibility for helping them at break times.

The quality of teaching is good. Adults have high expectations of the students and the quality of dialogue with them encourages mature responses. Occasionally, the high expectations slip when some tasks are insufficiently challenging or too much support is given to students. The curriculum is outstanding. Very effective partnerships with Education Business Plus, Connexions, local high schools and colleges enable teachers to provide students with a wide and increasing choice of learning pathways to meet their aspirations. Exceptional care and guidance help students to make the best choices and to benefit from out-of-school learning experiences that are worthwhile and very safe. The school accommodation does not readily provide sixth formers with a space of their own that acknowledges their increased maturity, independence and individuality.

The widening of opportunities for students comes from the dedicated and enthusiastic approach of the sixth form leader. With strong support from members of the governing body she is demonstrating an excellent capacity to realise her vision for improving the quality of sixth-form provision and the range of students' choices even further. Staff work in a very close partnership with parents and carers, especially in preparing students for leaving school when they are 19 years old which, for most of them, is their first major transition since the age of four.

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*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>1</b>
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

Almost half of the parents and carers completed the questionnaire sent out by Ofsted before the inspection. This is an above-average response. All of the respondents are fully supportive of the school. A group who spoke to the lead inspector explained that this is because they see their children being so happy in school and making so much progress in many aspects of their learning and development. One parent even said that her child wants to come to school on Christmas Day because he loves it so much. They feel valued as true partners in the education of their children. They really appreciate the open two-way communication between home and school which helps parents and carers and staff to be consistent in the way they respond to the children. Because families live so far apart the parents and carers particularly welcome the many opportunities provided by the school for them to come together socially, to learn from each other and to learn from the school about how they can more effectively meet the needs of their children. The inspection findings support these very positive views.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Fox Wood Special 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 30 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 63 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	87	4	13	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	26	87	4	13	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	26	87	4	13	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	73	8	27	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	27	90	3	10	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	67	10	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	70	9	30	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)	21	70	6	20	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	87	4	13	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	77	7	23	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	73	8	27	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	22	73	8	27	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	80	6	20	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

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



14 July 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Fox Wood Special School, Warrington, WA3 6QW**

Thank you for your help when I came with Alastair to inspect your school. I learned so much from looking at your work and talking to you. I looked at your website and got a very good idea of all the exciting things you do, both in school and when you go out on visits. You have helped me to decide that your school is outstanding.

I watched you coming into school in the morning and I could see that you were really looking forward to the day ahead. You enjoy school very much indeed. All the adults in the school make sure that you work hard in lessons and learn lots of new skills. They also look after you very well. You enjoy having a bit of fun with your teachers and carers but, at the same time, you behave very well. I thought you were very good at getting on with your work when new people like me came into your classroom. You told us how much you enjoy visiting other schools and making new friends. Your garden is doing very well and I saw all your fresh-grown vegetables on sale in the staff room. They were so good that there were hardly any left for me to buy. You weren't just selling them, though. I saw how much you were learning about using them to make a healthy meal. You love your music and I saw how good many of you are at singing when I watched a film of your recent performance for other schools.

The headteacher and staff want to make your school even better and we have agreed with them how they can do this. They are going to look very carefully at what you are learning in each lesson so that they can make sure you learn even more in the next lesson.

Thank you very much again for showing me so much about your life in Fox Wood.

Yours sincerely

John Rutherford

Her Majesty's Inspector

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