

The Pioneer School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134100
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	360602
Inspection dates	7–8 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Lucie Calow

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
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	117
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pamela Stanley
Headteacher	Steve Horsted
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2008
School address	Ghyllgrove Basildon SS14 2LA
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Twelve lessons were observed during which eleven teachers and one teaching assistant who was leading a lesson were seen. Meetings were held with pupils, members of the school leadership team and with representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation form; progress tracking data; and safeguarding documentation. They analysed 54 parental questionnaires, 49 pupil questionnaires and 33 staff questionnaires.

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

- How well does the school's curriculum dovetail subject learning with key skill development?
- How much progress do pupils make in their academic and social and personal learning from their individual starting points?
- How effectively do leaders and managers ensure a balance between support and challenge in learning for all groups of pupils?

Information about the school

The Pioneer school is an Essex New Model Special School providing education for pupils with severe and complex learning disabilities. Since its previous inspection the school has moved into new, purpose-built premises and is co-located with a mainstream secondary school. The large majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties. A few have profound and multiple learning difficulties and a similar proportion have more moderate learning difficulties. Approximately a quarter of pupils have autism. A higher number of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals than is the national average. There are nearly twice as many male than female pupils. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is smaller than average: most pupils are White British and seven other ethnic groups are represented in the school. A few pupils have English as an additional language. Some pupils join or leave the school at times other than at the usual start or end of a key stage. Admissions are on an individual needs basis and, as a result, year group numbers fluctuate widely. The school has achieved several awards including the ICT Mark for information and communication technology, Activemark for promoting sport, and the International Schools award at intermediate level. The in-house meals service has been rated highly for nutrition and hygiene standards by environmental health professionals and by the local council.

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

1

Main findings

This is a good and rapidly improving school. It has many features which are outstanding and provides high quality provision for all pupils. The school motto 'care, respect and confidence' is evident in many ways. Outstanding leadership and management have secured impressive progress in key areas at the same time as managing the move into the new building. Impressive facilities of a very high quality are available not only to pupils but also to the wider community. Inside the building there is strong evidence of how much pupils have contributed to the project, for example through imaginative and creative art work. Leaders and managers have shown decisive leadership in securing further funding to complete the building plans. The school has improved so that several key outcomes for pupils which were previously satisfactory are now outstanding. This has been achieved because the school has a very clear understanding of its strengths and areas for further development. Views of stakeholders, including parents and carers and external agencies, are highly valued and help to inform suitable priorities. As a consequence, the school's capacity for further improvement is also outstanding.

Partnerships supporting the curriculum are exceptionally well developed and embedded. For example, on-site health authority provision ensures the maximum benefit to pupils because the school employs assistants routinely to deliver therapy programmes under the training and guidance of the lead therapists. Many medical clinics are held at the school and this arrangement minimises disruption to pupils' learning and contributes to multi-agency support to families. Physical health is central to the school's focus. This can be seen through physiotherapy provision and through opportunities for swimming and sporting events. Pupils told inspectors that swimming is their favourite activity. Physical activity is coupled with high quality catering and nutrition. As a result, the extent to which pupils adopt health lifestyles is outstanding.

The school's curriculum, including the strength of partnerships, is outstanding. There is now a highly effective balance between subject teaching and key skills development. There is an appropriate focus on community learning which increases as pupils move into older key stages. Enrichments to the curriculum are highly relevant and motivating, such as theme days for modern foreign language and cultural diversity. As a result, pupils become confident, communicative young people who are eager for new experiences. Pupils get on well together within an exceptionally cohesive community. Some pupils do have behaviours which challenge and questionnaire responses show this is a concern to some pupils. The school has systems, training and external support to meet these needs. While behaviour and progress are good overall, the amount of progress pupils make in acquiring social skills such as communication, taking responsibility for their personal hygiene, independence at meal times and, eventually, attending college and work experience placements is excellent. As a consequence of these positive strands to provision, pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils

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make an outstanding contribution to the school community by taking on positions of responsibility, caring for each other, making a significant and valued contribution to the development of the new building and through the work of the school council. The impact they have on their wider community can be seen through projects such as visits to a local care home and a school partnership project aimed at reducing crime in the local area.

Progress is good overall. There is no significant variation between groups of pupils but there is variation between individuals and between some subjects and key stages. The school has developed clear plans to tackle these and is monitoring the success of these plans closely. The school has developed a clear tracking system for monitoring pupil progress in curriculum subjects, including personal, social and health education (PSHE). There are robust systems for identifying pupils who underachieve, setting targets for improvement and monitoring further progress. Issues at the time of the school's previous inspection, identifying some concerns over the progress made by pupils with moderate learning difficulties, have been successfully addressed. The school curriculum very appropriately focuses on the development of key skills for individual pupils, but there is no system for drawing this data together so that comparisons between groups and individuals can be comprehensively made.

In line with progress, the quality of teaching and learning is good overall. While there is some variation in the quality of lessons, the large majority observed were good or better and some lessons seen were outstanding. The school has clear and structured procedures for monitoring and supporting the development of high quality teaching. In the best lessons, provision for learning is highly personalised with teachers using questions and variations in activity to increase learning. Communication support, for example, through signing is very well embedded, behaviour management skilfully ensures that learning can continue and time is used constructively. These strong features are not always evident. In some lessons behaviour management is less effective and some opportunities to make best use of the time available and to extend all pupils are missed.

Engagement with parents and carers is outstanding. Development of 'unified planning meetings' has led to high attendance at these meetings because they provide a holistic overview of pupil development for families and carers. A new initiative has recently included a parent-led support group. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and appreciative of the help they receive as shown through the exceptionally positive responses received from questionnaires. Support for pupils and families at key moments of transition such as into the Early Years Foundation Stage and sixth form are flexible, personalised and effective.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Bring together all the information the school has about pupils' individual progress in developing key skills for analysis and comparison.
- Ensure that all pupils are very well supported and challenged in all lessons according to their individual abilities and needs.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In line with their learning difficulties, attainment on entry for all pupils is low and remains low because of the nature of their needs. However, the school is successful in securing

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good pupil progress from individual starting points. The very large majority of pupils meet or exceed their targets based on the schools systems for monitoring progress. There is very little variation in this overall pattern for groups of pupils identified as having moderate, severe or profound learning disabilities. There is some slight variation between the proportion of pupils who exceed rather than meet their expected progress within these groups. For example, a high proportion of pupils with moderate learning difficulties now exceed their targets. This is a considerable improvement from the time of the schools previous inspection. Pupils with autism make good progress. A few individual pupils do not make as much progress as expected and there is some variation in subject success and key stage success. The school has clear systems for identifying and addressing these issues. Some variation was observed in the amount of progress pupils made in lessons. Some lessons are outstanding and pupils make rapid progress in them. In a small minority of lessons the progress of individual pupils is limited because activities, challenge or support are not sufficiently personalised.

The needs of girls are well met, for example, by providing single sex education sessions appropriate for the age, needs and maturity levels of pupils. In line with the pattern of progress for groups of pupils with different levels of special educational needs, pupils in the care of the local authority or who are known to be eligible for free school meals, make good progress. Leaders and managers routinely scrutinise data to ensure that these pupils make the same amount of progress as their peers. The school has good systems to ensure that all pupils have full access to school trips and residential holidays. Careful attention to individual needs ensures that cultural and religious diversity is well met, for example through the provision of appropriate school meals. Pupils get on well with each other and join in with a range of celebration events.

Attendance is broadly average for the student population as a whole. School data is adversely affected by the frequent absence of a small number of pupils whose medical conditions prevent them from attending regularly. Some pupils who have long periods of absence are supported to continue their learning through home visits by key workers.

Pupils who join the school at different points in their educational careers have their needs very well met. The school is flexible in its admissions arrangements, for example by providing home visits, key worker support, organisation of class groupings and early entry to the sixth form, according to individual pupil circumstance and needs. Pupils receive a warm welcome, quickly become part of the school community and have assessments and learning targets set in a timely and appropriate way. It is striking how the school develops in pupils the confidence and capacity to become highly valued members of the school community.

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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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
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	2
Taking into account:	3
Pupils' attendance 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

* 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 quality of teaching and learning is good. In general it is built on high quality, appropriate relationships between adults and pupils. Staff know their pupils extremely well. In particular, the minute attention that staff show to the communications and responses of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties is excellent. Leaders and managers have established clear and structured systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. These include, for example, a comprehensive handbook, external support for moderation, purposeful routine observations and regular scrutiny of planning.

The outstanding curriculum is highly personalised and, because of this, it delivers equally high outcomes for pupils in how they adopt healthy lifestyles and make a contribution to school life. The curriculum secures excellent opportunities for pupils to develop positive behaviours and to extend their social skills. It is highly effective in enabling pupils, because of this, to take part in cultural, sporting and artistic events through purposeful enrichment events. Advice and therapy programmes from external agencies, such as educational psychology and health, are effectively integrated into pupils' individual programmes. An effective balance is achieved between key skills development and subject teaching so that the curriculum is broad, balanced and highly relevant. Accreditation is appropriate.

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Good quality care guidance and support is achieved through the personal interactions of adults with their pupils. Pupils develop an appropriate awareness of issues such as e-safety. Attention to care and well-being is especially well developed and personal care takes place discreetly. School systems for support are well organised and consistently applied.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

This impressive leadership team is very ably led by the headteacher. Together with the governing body they have been successful in securing and managing the move into new building premises, obtaining funding for the next stage and simultaneously securing improvements in key aspects of the school's work. The school is outstandingly well-placed to improve further.

Committed governors are regular visitors to the school. The organisation of the governing body is effective and, while there have been recent changes in membership, it has maintained a good varied set of skills to benefit the school. There is an appropriate focus on training and induction for new governors. Policies are reviewed on a clear rolling programme and safeguarding has a very high priority.

The highly personalised approach which permeates all of the school's work with pupils ensures that equal opportunities are well met. There are no significant variations in how well groups of pupils do and where the school has historically identified possible gaps, for example in the amount of progress made by pupils with moderate learning difficulties, they have been successfully tackled.

Safeguarding is good overall and some aspects are very effective. All procedures and policies are in place and a good level of training is provided for staff. Issues of safety, such as e-safety, are well integrated into the curriculum and pupils are aware of them.

Community cohesion is a notable aspect of the school's work. A highly cohesive ethos is evident throughout the school and it is mirrored in the exceptionally positive views expressed in the questionnaires analysed. International links have been fostered in a relevant way which captures pupils' imaginations and has led to meaningful activities to deepen their understanding and enjoyment of cultural diversity. Community links are well embedded and tackle some challenging issues, such as identifying and reducing crime in the local community. The school has a very clear understanding of the context of its own community and is also flexible at meeting the changing needs of pupils.

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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	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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

In line with the main school, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress. Most enter the school at levels well below those expected for their ages and many do not achieve the early learning goals by the end of the Reception Year. For this reason, assessment of progress takes place using the main school's assessment systems and data is integrated into the primary school data base. Relative to their starting points, children make good progress in developing communication and early self-help skills, such as developing personal hygiene routines. They forge excellent relationships with the adults who teach and care for them. Structured choice-making is carefully integrated into the curriculum. Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage are very appropriately aware of how challenging some pupils, particularly those with autism or profound learning difficulties, can find unstructured play. This is the reason why choice making is often limited or guided. The importance of learning how to be able to play more freely and with peers is recognised through timetabled play afternoons. 'Choosing time' at the end of structured activities does not always focus on extending play in a similar way.

Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are of good quality and include good safeguarding procedures. Leaders ensure that appropriate assessments are carried out at a suitable interval after admission and, in some cases statutory assessment, continues after admission. Effective links are forged with parents and carers and with other agencies, such as health practitioners. These provide a very solid platform for the future.

Provision is outstanding because of high quality teaching, the rigorous use of constant assessment which is very well applied and the excellent personal support when children begin school. As one parent commented: 'Teaching staff are excellent and the support staff brilliant, so helpful experienced and caring. They have made transition from pre-school to special needs school very easy.'

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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	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

Good leadership, good provision and good outcomes mean that the school provides a solid and reliable sixth form experience for its pupils. Progress is good and those pupils at risk of underachievement are clearly identified and their further progress is carefully monitored. High quality teaching ensures pupils are motivated to attend and they enjoy their learning. Particularly high levels of care and attention to extending personal skill development were observed for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The management of challenging behaviours within lessons is skilful. The curriculum is comprehensive and suitably based on community learning. This leads to the acquisition of useful life skills, such as being able to use the express check-out in a supermarket.

When pupils leave they go on to further education and supported placements. Leaders proactively search out appropriate courses for their pupils on an individual basis. Some pupils join The Pioneer school at the start of the sixth form from other secondary special schools. The school offers highly personalised support in the way it manages and times these admissions. Pupils find a warm welcome and inspectors observed them quickly integrating into class groups and engaging with learning.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Responses from parents and carers returning the inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. All agreed that the school keeps their children safe, that it meets their particular needs and that they make enough progress. All parents and carers said that they are kept well informed. As one parent put it, 'Teaching staff and assistants respond to each child's different needs effectively and make school a happy and friendly

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place to be.' Inspectors also found this to be the case. A very small number of responses said that their child does not enjoy school despite positive aspects of school provision. Inspectors found that the school has good procedures for responding to individual concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Pioneer 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 54 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 117 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	43	80	9	17	2	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	41	76	13	24	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	38	70	16	30	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	31	57	23	43	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	31	57	20	37	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	58	21	40	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	54	24	44	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)	24	44	25	46	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	32	59	22	41	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	50	21	39	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	46	27	52	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	29	55	23	43	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	36	67	18	33	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).

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">■ 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.



11 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Pioneer School, Basildon, SS14 2LA

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we came to visit your school recently, for talking to us and for filling in the questionnaires. Most of you told us that you enjoy school, that adults care for you, listen to you and that you learn a lot in lessons. We thought that too. A few of you told us that behaviour is not good in your school. We found that behaviour is good overall but in some instances it is more of a difficulty. This letter is to tell you what else we found.

We are pleased you go to such a good school. Your new building is really wonderful. Your school has chosen a very good motto 'care, respect and confidence' because that is what we found when we came to see you. We were particularly impressed with how your school community works together and how confident, happy and healthy you are. You make good progress and the curriculum, that is what teachers plan for you to do and learn, is outstanding.

Mr Horsted and senior staff do a really good job leading your school. You have good lessons. To make your school even better we have asked them to do two things.

Gather together all of the information about how well you are getting on and make sure you are all doing as well as you possibly can do.

Make sure that in your lessons you all learn as much as you can and do not spend too much time waiting for others to finish what they are doing.

You can help too by continuing to be enthusiastic, joining in with everything and trying hard. Mr Horsted knows that your ideas are important so make sure he gets to hear them through the school council.

I wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Lucie Calow

Lead inspector

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