

Forest Oak School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104132
Local Authority	Solihull
Inspection number	377019
Inspection dates	26–27 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Alan Dobbins

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	4–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	129
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Kendrick
Headteacher	Amanda Mordey (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2009
School address	Windward Way Birmingham B36 0UE
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed, in part or in full, 14 lessons and all 11 of the school's classteachers. They held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, staff, groups of pupils and the school's local authority link adviser. Inspectors looked at policies and reviewed documents and the school's data on pupils' progress. They scrutinised 20 questionnaires from parents and carers and spoke with 14 parents.

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

- How accurate is the school's information on pupils' attainment and their progress?
- How well do teachers meet the learning needs of all the pupils in their classes?
- How much benefit is gained from the formal links with other schools and colleges in raising achievement and in broadening pupils' learning experiences?
- How good a start has the sixth form made and is it well placed to improve?

Information about the school

Forest Oak School is an average-sized special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Increasingly, pupils are entering the school with more complex difficulties that include behavioural and social difficulties, autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are more boys than girls. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The school is co-located on a campus with two other schools: a special school with specialist status for communication and interaction, and a secondary school with specialist sports college status. The school entered into a hard federation arrangement with the special school in April 2009. They have the same principal and governing body. Sixth form provision was opened in September 2010. The school has National Healthy Schools status.

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

Forest Oak is an outstanding school. It is a safe and happy place where, routinely, staff and pupils go purposefully about their business. Pupils flourish as learners and develop towards being as independent as is possible. They are prepared outstandingly well for the next stage of their education and their future lives. Parents and carers are quick to praise the school. One said that the school is 'amazing' and that she would 'not know what to do without it'.

Only a small number of children join the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Those who do have an outstanding start to their schooling. They settle well and make outstanding progress. In Years 1 to 11, pupils make outstanding progress in literacy and numeracy. This is accelerated in the middle years where most pupils make more progress than is expected nationally for learners without special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is because the small class sizes and outstanding teaching ensure that each pupil learns what is right for them. The sixth form has got off to a good start; the first students so far have gained good grades on relevant nationally accredited awards. The sixth form base is too closely linked with the school, however, and does not provide the more adult environment required to best prepare students for the next stage of their education and their future lives.

Pupils and staff relate very well with each other. Pupils trust staff and see them as friends who will quickly help them if they are troubled. Pupils say that they like school and their parents and carers confirm this. They attend regularly. Their outstandingly good behaviour in lessons is an important factor in their excellent progress. Over time, their understanding of right and wrong becomes secure and many show maturity when they have difficult choices to make, especially those to do with staying safe and keeping healthy.

The principal leads an outstanding team of senior leaders. They are fully supported by the rest of the staff in their efforts to improve the school. Their self-evaluation procedures provide an accurate picture of the school, and they know its strengths and weaknesses very well. The Chair of the Governing Body leads a team of governors who provide considerable support to senior leaders but who offer less challenge. This is because they do not analyse assessment information well enough in judging the progress of pupils against national expectations or equivalent pupils in other similar schools. Since the last inspection, there has been significant improvement in important aspects of the school. Pupils are making better progress, over a broader and more cohesive curriculum because teaching is better. The

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capacity for sustaining improvement is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To maintain the very high standards the governing body should ensure that its members:
 - fully and systematically evaluate the work of the school by requiring senior leaders to provide them with all the relevant information
 - provide a suitable learning environment to best prepare sixth form students for their life in the adult world.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils flourish both as learners and as young people as they become increasingly independent. This is so for all pupils, including the minority of girls and those with more complex needs who have the greatest difficulty in their learning and in relating to others.

Most lessons are enjoyable events. The classrooms are spacious and bright and because class sizes are small, pupils have plenty of space to work independently, or, when required, to join together to share and to listen and improve their language and social skills. They enjoy learning and see lessons as fun. In one, they needed to listen to a story then retell it in their own words. Careful planning resulted in each pupil working on telling the story in a way that best challenged them as learners. The most able wrote the story in their own words, and then joined together in planning to present the story to younger pupils in a different class. The next group used a worksheet of the story, which required that they choose and write in the key words that were missing. The third group identified the words orally then chose the word from a list of prepared words to stick into the space in the typed story. At the end of the lesson, each pupil showed they had met the learning objective of retelling a story, and many had made additional gains in improving their reading and writing skills.

School records persuasively show the impressive progress pupils make in literacy and numeracy over Years 3 to 9. The progress made in developing social skills and moving towards independence is equally good. Pupils leave Year 11 with a wide range of nationally accredited awards that fully reflect their learning capacity and their interests. These include examinations in English, mathematics, science and in less usual subjects for a special school, such as Spanish and leisure and tourism. Pupils expect to be successful in the next stage of their education, and, generally, they are. Most of those who left in each of the last two years continue to follow their college courses, or have moved to the school's new sixth form.

The school's success in gaining National Healthy Schools status, and the close links

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with the co-located secondary school with specialist sports status, reflect and contribute significantly to the very clear awareness pupils have of the importance of staying healthy. They know which foods are healthy and a good percentage attend the lunch-time and after-school sports clubs. The school provides many additional opportunities to help pupils become more self-confident and self-assured. Pupils are proud to be members of the school council and the eco committee. The head boy and head girl take their duties very seriously, as do those who have been selected as prefects and playground monitors. They gain good awareness of the needs of the local community through their many visits, such as to local shops and parks in support of their learning and, for the older pupils, through their work experience placements. Pupils’ strong relationships with staff, the clear expectations for learning and behaviour and their gains in self-confidence and self-esteem support an implicit understanding of spiritual, moral and social issues, such as the importance of trust, belief and friendship.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
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	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

School records suggest, and inspection findings confirm, that in the majority of lessons, teaching is outstanding. The improvement in teaching has been achieved over a period of time when an increasing number of pupils have required teachers and their assistants to show a greater range of skills, knowledge and expertise. More

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 for the pupils’ age.

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often than not, staff fully meet this challenge. They do this through careful planning that makes learning relevant to each pupil; through outstanding teamwork; and the expert use of additional communication strategies, such as signing, symbols, picture exchange and visual sequencing. Teachers and their assistants are practised at dealing with the needs of specific pupils, for example, in using amplification equipment for pupils with hearing issues or following specific teaching strategies for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.

The curriculum is designed to promote learning and personal and social development in a flexible and meaningful way. It also matches provision closely to that identified in each pupil’s statement of special educational needs. That it is effective is clear from pupils’ outstanding progress and their strong expectation that they will be successful in the next stage of their education. A primary aim, to develop the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, is achieved very well in English and mathematics lessons. But, in all of the lessons, pupils have additional planned opportunities to rehearse their emerging communication and number skills because cross-curricular mapping is done so well. The partnerships with the two co-located schools make a powerful contribution to raising achievement and to extending pupils’ opportunities for learning. Teachers gain additional skills and expertise by regularly taking part in training led by staff with specialist knowledge from the partner schools. The specialist facilities of the other schools, such as the dedicated room for the Treatment and Education of Communicationally Challenged Children (TEACCH) at the special school and the swimming pool and fitness suite at the secondary school, add relevance and breadth to pupils’ learning.

Parents and carers are very pleased with the advice and support they, and their children, receive. The regular contacts with the family support worker and learning mentor are very helpful, for example, in advising how they can help their children in taking greater control of their behaviour at home or in matters to do with the family. In school, the procedures for improving behaviour and the merit system, which recognises the special work or efforts in lessons, are understood and accepted by pupils. These provide clear guidance on the expectations for behaviour and effort. They make a considerable contribution to pupils’ increasing control of their behaviour and to their outstanding attitudes to their work. The effective help of other professionals, such as the speech therapist, the nurse and the Connexions specialist, means that all pupils gain full access to all that the school offers. Pupils’ passage through school is smooth and easy, as is their transfer to the local college or the sixth form. The school has done well in increasing the attendance of the very few irregular attenders.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where	1

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relevant, through partnerships	
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection, the vision, ambition and competence of the senior leadership team has brought about improvement in important areas of the school’s work. Initiatives, such as forming classes for literacy and numeracy according to pupils’ capability and not their age, introducing the behaviour support programme and the merit system, and requiring a consistent approach to lesson planning, have all helped teachers be more effective in their work. There is a greater sense of purpose. Parents and carers are especially pleased that improvements have not resulted in a diminishing of the caring and supportive ethos. Day to day, the school is a calm and well-ordered place where pupils and staff go steadfastly about their business in the quest to be as successful as possible. The governing body is well led. In recent years, its members have provided considerable support and guidance to the leadership team in their drive to improve the school, especially, in the addition of the sixth form.

Safeguarding procedures are thorough. The school ensures that it adopts best practice and levels of training are high. The provision for community cohesion is developing. Pupils have detailed knowledge of their local community through many well-established links and through their regular visits to local places. Experiences of communities outside of the local area are more limited. International links are being established. Partnerships are having a very beneficial impact on the range and quality of the learning experiences available to pupils. The close links with the two co-located schools, and with other relevant agencies, provide outstanding support for the work of the school.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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money

Early Years Foundation Stage

The small number of children who join the Early Years Foundation Stage make outstanding progress in all areas of learning. This is the direct result of insightful and very well-planned teaching that results in children routinely learning what is right for them.. Assessment information is quickly gained on each child to identify their developmental levels. Progress is regularly recorded. This information is used very well in creating activities that are relevant for each child. The Early Years Foundation Stage base is an attractive place. It is exceptionally well resourced with a good outside play area that is used well to extend childrens’ learning. Outstanding leadership and management underpin children’s outstanding preparation for their work in Year 1.

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

Sixth form

As the sixth form opened only a year ago, records of attainment and progress of students refer only to those who left last year. These students were well prepared for the next stage of their education, which involved moving on to a course at a local college of further education. Teaching is most often good and sometimes outstanding. Consequently, students make good progress towards gaining good grades on a range of accredited courses that suit their capabilities and interests. The flexible curriculum provides many opportunities to learn outside school, including in a wide range of work placements. These are of particular benefit because they add considerable breadth to students’ learning experiences. Also, they provide valuable opportunities to gain the self-confidence and self-assurance that comes from meeting new challenges in the adult world.

The sixth form has made a good start. Nevertheless, senior leaders are right to recognise the inadequacies of the current accommodation. Plans for a new sixth form building have been agreed with the local authority. This building has been designed to contrast with the learning environment experienced lower down the school in favour of providing more adult orientated opportunities and routines.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
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

The relatively small number of parents and carers who returned the questionnaire, and those who talked to an inspector, are extremely pleased with the work of the school. They provide very strong support for all aspects of the school. They are especially pleased that their children enjoy being at school and that they are safe there. They like the high quality of the teaching, the progress their children make, and the way the school is led and managed. They are of the opinion that their children are being prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of their education and their future lives. Most parents and carers would fully support the statement of one who wrote that, 'Forest Oak is an outstanding school.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Forest Oak 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 20 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 129 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	9	45	11	55	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	60	7	35	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	9	45	8	40	2	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	45	10	50	1	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	10	50	9	45	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	9	45	10	50	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	55	9	45	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)	7	35	11	55	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	11	55	8	40	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	50	9	45	1	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	40	10	50	0	0	1	5
The school is led and managed effectively	12	60	7	35	1	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	12	60	8	40	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



28 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Forest Oak School, Birmingham, B36 0UE

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We found it to be an outstanding school. We liked many things and we are pleased about this. These are some of the things we especially liked.

- You make outstanding progress in your learning and in the way you grow up to be as independent as possible.
- You are looked after exceptionally well at school and get plenty of additional help to deal with any issues you may have.
- You say that you feel safe and secure at school and enjoy being there.
- The teachers and their assistants work really hard to make sure you are able to always do your best
- Your principal, the other senior leaders and all staff are working to make the school an even better place for you.

The most important thing for the school to do to continue to improve is to provide a different base in the sixth form, so the students can gain from acting in a more grown up way. I have also asked the governing body to make sure that it gains all the necessary information from the principal so that it can judge how well you are all doing.

Of course, you can all help by continuing to behave as well as you did when we visited you and by always working as hard.

Yours sincerely

Alan Dobbins
Lead inspector

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