

The Forest School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121775
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	380315
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	122
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Suzy Ham
Headteacher	Peter Hewitt
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 November 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Thirteen lessons were observed involving 11 different teachers. Meetings were held with many different staff, two members of the governing body and a group of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including that relating to school improvement and the safeguarding of pupils. Eighty-four questionnaires returned by parents and carers were analysed.

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

- The effectiveness with which staff encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour and learning.
- How well teachers use assessment to vary tasks and let pupils know how well they are doing and how they could improve their work.
- How effectively the curriculum is personalised to meet individual needs.
- How effectively the Early Years Foundation Stage caters to the needs of pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2 included in the setting.

Information about the school

All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils with moderate learning difficulties has fallen significantly since the last inspection. The largest group is now that of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. There are also significant numbers of pupils with physical disabilities, severe learning difficulties or speech, language and communication difficulties. Pupils come from a very wide catchment area across the south of the county. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is well-above average. Most pupils are White British. There are about twice as many boys as girls. The proportion of looked after children is higher than average.

A new headteacher took up post in January 2011. In September 2010, the school was awarded specialist status for communication and interaction. The school has achieved Healthy School status and holds the Sportsmark and Activemark awards.

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. It does some important things outstandingly well. A very large majority of parents and carers expresses highly positive views about the outstanding care, guidance and support extended to pupils. Most pupils say they enjoy attending, feel safe and learn a lot in lessons.

The school is led, managed and governed well. It runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Partnerships with parents and carers are outstanding and the school has developed many outstanding links with other providers, organisations and services that contribute to the good, and occasionally outstanding, outcomes achieved by pupils. Good teaching leads to pupils making good progress and achieving well. In the primary department, pupils make similar progress in mathematics and English, but, in the secondary department, progress and standards are better in mathematics than in English. Pupils with communication difficulties are helped greatly to make similar progress to others through skilled interventions funded and supported by the school's specialist status.

The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles is outstanding. A large majority of pupils participates with great enthusiasm in physical activities and there are many competitive sporting opportunities. Excellent attention is paid to pupils' mental and emotional health in addition to their physical well-being. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community. They were heavily involved in designing and developing the sensory garden and are currently involved in choosing resources to make playtimes more fun. Also, pupils research local charities and decide how to raise funds for their chosen ones. The spiritual, moral social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. Assemblies are vibrant and a strong sense of celebration pervades school life. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a very wide range of artistic and cultural events. They develop a keen sense of right and wrong and mix very well socially.

School improvement is planned carefully. Areas for improvement identified by the previous inspection have been successfully addressed. Leaders and managers are strongly promoting the involvement of all staff in school improvement activities. There is clear identification of areas of responsibility. Although self-evaluation is generally good, it is occasionally a little over-optimistic. Nevertheless, the school demonstrates a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in English in Key Stages 3 and 4 to the level where they at least match those in mathematics by:
 - improving teaching and learning in the subject through closer monitoring and evaluation of teaching and pupils' work, to identify where improvement is necessary
 - improving the marking and annotation of pupils' work so the pupils know exactly how to improve their writing
 - strengthening the contribution of different subjects to pupils' understanding of literacy.

- Ensure that all aspects of school self-evaluation are based firmly on accurate analysis of information.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils, nearly always, join the school at a very low level of attainment. With very rare exceptions, the nature of their learning difficulties means that it would be unrealistic to expect them to reach national expectations before they leave. As such, it is inappropriate to take into account attainment against national averages when judging achievement, so the judgement about achievement is determined by that for their learning and progress. No Year 11 pupil leaves without some form of accreditation, usually reflecting attainment at about Level 2 of the National Curriculum. A small number gain GCSE qualifications in the lower grades. In recent years, all pupils have left to go to positive destinations, with most staying on in education or training. Other than in English at Key Stages 3 and 4, where progress is satisfactory rather than good, there is no significant difference in the achievement of any group of pupils.

In lessons, pupils work hard and concentrate well. In an outstanding mathematics lesson, pupils settled quickly to work, took the initiative in their contributions and made exceptional progress against their clearly identified individual targets and the learning objectives of the lesson.

Behaviour is good, but some pupils remain over-reliant on adult support. That is evident in the high levels of adult supervision at lunch and break times. It is very rare for misbehaviour to interfere with pupils' learning in lessons and generally pupils behave considerately towards each other.

Pupils attend whenever they can because they enjoy school and feel safe there. The school goes to great lengths to encourage pupils to stay healthy and many achieve considerable sporting success, especially in swimming, where there are examples of individuals representing the region and county. High-quality work in art and music contributes exceptionally well to pupils' self-esteem and their creative awareness. Pupils have many excellent opportunities to learn about how people from other religions and cultures lead their lives. There are frequent visits to different places of worship and to destinations where there is a greater ethnic mix than is found locally.

Older pupils participate enthusiastically in work-related activities and throughout the school there is a strong focus on enterprise activities. Pupils have won 'trade-fair' and 'business manager' awards, sometimes in competition with mainstream schools. In combination with good achievement and the good acquisition of personal skills, that contributes to pupils being well prepared for the future.

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:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is occasionally outstanding. Where that is the case, it is because the teacher takes good account of pupils' prior learning to make sure that the tasks set are matched closely to individual needs and take notice of pupils' individual targets, as set out in their individual education plans. Less successful teaching is characterised by lessons where activities are too drawn out and too much time is spent reinforcing learning when it is clear that pupils have mastered the task in hand. Teaching assistants offer good support to pupils often in helping the pupils to manage their learning and behaviour. Teachers demonstrate skill frequently in promoting communication, for instance by using signing and pictures to help pupils communicate through their preferred means. The marking of pupils' work is usually good, but there are weaknesses in English at Key Stages 3 and 4, where pupils are not informed consistently about what they have achieved or how they could improve their work.

The curriculum is matched well to individual need. Pupils follow different 'pathways', ranging from highly supported to more independent systems of learning and development. The curriculum is supported strongly through the school's specialist status, to meet the communication and interaction requirements of those pupils with highly specific needs in this area. There is a good balance between the promotion of learning and of personal skills. The identification of ways in which all subjects can

¹The 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.

contribute to pupils' acquisition of literacy skills is underdeveloped. The curriculum is enriched exceptionally well by a huge range of activities, including an extensive programme of residential experiences. The work-related curriculum for older pupils is very well established, with all Key Stage 4 pupils having experience of a wide variety of vocational opportunities matched well to their interests and abilities.

Pupils are given excellent support and guidance and are extremely well cared for. As a result, they can make the best of the opportunities they are provided with. Staff demonstrate an acute awareness of the needs of each pupil and support is carefully directed. Some timid pupils say they would not feel safe except for the fact that they know staff will look after them when they are worried. The school works exceptionally closely with families and agencies that support the care and welfare of children. Parents and carers appreciate the fact that staff always 'go the extra mile' to support them and their children, such as when reviews of progress are held in the family homes of pupils when logistical difficulties are evident. Parents' and carers' confidence in the school means that, despite the health issues experienced by many pupils, the pupils attend school as regularly as possible.

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?

Leaders communicate high expectations successfully and staff respond well. They are proud to be associated with the school and feel their respective contributions are valued. Staff appreciate the extra responsibilities that they have been given for evaluating the work of the school and contributing to its improvement. Areas of weakness in provision have been targeted precisely for improvement, but analysis of the reasons why progress in English slips in Key Stages 3 and 4 has not been sufficiently rigorous.

The governing body is highly supportive. It has worked effectively to resolve financial preoccupations. It ensures that statutory requirements are met rigorously and plays a full part in ensuring that the school is a safe place and is staffed by suitable people. The governing body is kept well informed about the views of parents, carers, staff and pupils by the headteacher, but does not do enough to find out what everyday life in the school is like.

The school works exceptionally well with parents and carers to obtain successful outcomes for the pupils. Parents and carers are consulted regularly and feel that the school takes particularly good account of their views. The school works exceptionally closely with many other agencies, professionals and alternative providers. Many close links with mainstream schools open up excellent links for pupils to be included in those settings. Excellent partnerships with local colleges and employers enhance the work-based curriculum for older pupils greatly.

Good attention is paid to the promotion of equal opportunities. Gaps between the performance and participation of different groups are usually identified quickly and good initiatives put in place to remedy them. The safeguarding of pupils is good. Recommended best practice is followed and staff are particularly well trained in the safeguarding, protection and handling of pupils. Nevertheless, there are elements in the recording of incidents that could be improved to make the records more rapidly accessible at short notice. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. There is wide recognition by pupils and staff that the school serves a very varied community in terms of socio-economic circumstances, religion and, to a lesser extent, ethnicity. There is a strong commitment to promoting harmony. Staff, often supported through the school’s specialist status, work extensively with local schools. There are strong links with the local church and there are widespread links with other local community groups such as the allotment society.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

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

The Early Years Foundation Stage setting includes several Key Stage 1 pupils. They are included because it is the type of provision they need to address their stage of learning and development in order to move on successfully to primary education at a later point, or because the nature of their needs is becoming more intense. The department is led and managed well, but there is a need for more attention to be paid to the daily, ongoing recording and assessment of the tiny steps by which children can be seen to be making progress.

The learning environment is calm, supportive and settled. Children are quickly taught how important it is to take turns and they get on well with one another. Resources are readily accessible to children to make it easy for them to explore and choose for themselves. The staff team works together well to provide a high quality, nurturing environment. There is a heady atmosphere of success in terms of learning and the acquisition of personal skills. Teaching is good. Children are happy and relate well to adults. The needs of older pupils are met well within this environment. There is caring and supportive attention to their specific needs.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

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

Views of parents and carers

There was an exceptionally high response to a questionnaire circulated prior to the inspection. Parents and carers are highly appreciative and supportive of the school’s work and the inspection findings reflect their positive views. A few parents and carers indicated particular aspects of the school with which they have concerns. The inspectors followed up each of these issues with the school. The school is going to consider how to meet the needs of those parents and carers who want more information about what their children achieve each day.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Forest 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 84 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 122 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	55	65	24	29	4	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	59	70	24	29	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	47	56	29	35	6	7	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	44	34	40	7	8	3	4
The teaching is good at this school	55	65	23	27	4	5	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	45	54	31	37	8	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	43	51	37	44	3	4	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)	45	54	28	33	3	4	3	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	55	65	22	26	3	4	3	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	46	55	33	39	1	1	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	43	51	35	42	4	5	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	52	62	26	31	1	1	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	57	68	20	24	5	6	2	2

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 is 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.



17 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Forest School, Knaresborough, HG5 0DQ

You attend a good school that does some things outstandingly well and you played a good part in convincing us about it. It is always refreshing to meet with young people who are inquisitive about who we are and what we are doing. Many of you asked questions when we inspected your school the other day. Thank you especially to those of you who spared precious time to talk to us about your experience of school.

You behave well and work and play happily together. You develop a really good understanding of how to live healthily and how to make a special contribution to the community. You are cared for exceptionally well. That is why you feel safe in school. You make good progress because you have good teaching. The school makes sure you have lots of interesting things to do. The people who lead and manage your school understand its strengths and weaknesses well and make sure it keeps improving. We have asked them to help pupils in the secondary department to learn better in English.

We send each of you our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alastair Younger
Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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