

Kirkham Pear Tree School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119887
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	379900
Inspection dates	30 April–1 May 2012
Lead 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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	72
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne Fielding
Headteacher	Lesley Sullivan
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2008
School address	29 Station Road Kirkham Preston PR4 2HA
Telephone number	01772 683609
Fax number	01772 681553
Email address	admin@peartree.lancs.sch.uk



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Introduction

Inspection team

Alastair Younger
John Ellwood

Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Nine lessons were observed, each taught by a different member of staff. Meetings were held with senior staff and representatives of the governing body. Discussions were held with staff, including teachers, classroom assistants and therapists. Inspectors took account of the views of parents and carers expressed through the return of 40 questionnaires during the inspection. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation including that relating to pupils' progress and school improvement.

Information about the school

This is a school for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have additional difficulties and disabilities including autism, sensory impairment and complex medical needs. About a fifth of all pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are of White British heritage.

Pear Tree is also a children's centre, providing services to families in the local community. Although the centre is led and managed by the headteacher and governing body it was inspected separately and a report about its quality can be found on the Ofsted website.

Since the last inspection, the deputy headteacher has left and has been replaced by two assistant headteachers. The school has received many awards since the last inspection, including becoming a specialist physical and sensory school and also a National College Leadership Development School.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
 Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- Nothing other than 'outstanding' can describe this wonderful school. It is a centre of pioneering innovation and goes to enormous lengths to meet the hugely complex needs of all of its pupils. It enjoys the total support of parents, staff are proud to be associated with it and pupils feel happy and safe.
- Achievement is outstanding. From starting points that are frequently at the very earliest stages of learning and development, pupils make excellent progress. The school is keen to develop more advanced systems to check the significance of the tiny steps by which those pupils with the most profound and multiple learning difficulties make progress.
- Outstanding teaching is central to the success of the school. Teachers are highly skilled in promoting communication through whatever means possible. They demonstrate an acute understanding of each pupil's needs, plan lessons immaculately to address these needs and ensure that activities to promote learning are vivid, exciting and memorable.
- Pupils demonstrate outstandingly good attitudes to learning and overcoming their difficulties. They behave exceptionally well in all situations. Independence and responsibility are strongly promoted. Pupils are given eminently sensible advice on how to stay safe and recognise potentially unsafe situations.
- Leadership, management and governance are outstanding. There is immaculate attention to detail in planning for improvement. All staff are strongly encouraged and enabled to take responsibility. The positive impact of initiatives to improve teaching and learning is clearly evident. Leaders and managers have skilfully managed the evolution of a curriculum that inspires learning and supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development outstandingly well.

- The sixth form is outstanding. The introduction of a greater range of vocational opportunities and improvements to the ways students can gain meaningful qualifications have been landmark improvements in recent years.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Pursue the further development of assessment procedures for monitoring and evaluating the progress of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties so as to identify and establish future routes towards further learning.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

In all lessons observed by inspectors, pupils made at least good progress. Frequently, progress was outstanding. This tallies closely with the school's own observations and self-evaluation as well as the views of parents and carers.

The nature of pupils' disabilities and special educational needs means that attainment on entry is always very low. By the time they leave, the highest attaining pupils demonstrate attainment equating to approximately Levels 1 or 2 of the National Curriculum. For Pear Tree pupils, outstanding progress is measured in small steps, and improvements are sustained day-in, day-out. Pupils are constantly challenged to do their best. They are exceptionally well taught and demonstrate outstanding attitudes towards learning. This is why achievement is outstanding and why all pupils leave to positive destinations, most frequently to specialist or day colleges.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve exceptionally well. Some wonderful examples of achievement were observed, including when children were given a huge range of learning opportunities, indoors and out and were able to demonstrate increasing awareness of, and response to, external stimuli.

Very few pupils develop the ability to read but many can recognise different sounds within words and some can pick out familiar words from text by sight. Nevertheless, the school strongly promotes literacy, largely through speaking and listening and the relentless approach to enabling pupils to develop powers of communication. It is here that outstanding progress is most evident. Through the use of a huge and innovative range of strategies to help pupils to express themselves, they become able to demonstrate choice and convey, for instance, any sense of discomfort.

The progress of different groups is carefully monitored and shows that no group of pupils achieves differently to any other. In terms of the available tools for assessing progress, some of the lowest attaining pupils appear to remain at a level not much different from that at which they entered. This could suggest little progress but this is not the case and staff are adept at spotting what may appear to be insignificant changes but that in reality are major forward strides. This is why the school is keen to develop a more bespoke form of assessment for these pupils.

Quality of teaching

Much of the teaching across the whole school is outstanding. It is never less than consistently good. This explains why pupils make sustained progress and achieve outstandingly well. Exceptionally high expectations are clearly evident. Immaculate attention is paid to planning work to help each individual achieve clearly stated targets for learning in each lesson. Teachers carefully check what pupils have remembered from previous lessons before embarking on the promotion of new learning. Throughout each lesson they, and their assistants, constantly check what new learning is happening or if pupils are struggling. At the end of each lesson there is a thorough check of what pupils have learned, usually involving the pupil in communicating whether he or she has fully understood or maybe needs a bit more help next lesson.

Teachers demonstrate considerable skill in managing large teams of highly-skilled classroom assistants to support pupils' learning, behaviour and comfort. Staff show a high level of skill in identifying how pupils communicate most effectively. This helps to engage all pupils and involve them in learning, for instance through the use of pictures, symbols, objects of reference or signing. Particularly good use of technological aids to communication was seen in a high dependency group of older pupils as they communicated their responses to stimuli relating to the sounds, sights and smells of the Olympic Games. Lessons are lively and stimulating with the result that pupils engage fully and are highly motivated across the whole, varied curriculum in which personal development is strongly promoted. In an exceptionally well-taught lesson, for instance, a small group of older pupils were given excellent advice as to how to introduce themselves politely and how to detect clues about how other people are feeling. While strongly supporting the development of pupils' emotional literacy, this lesson also gave invaluable advice to pupils as to how to stay safe and be socially aware. Behaviour is very sensitively managed and pupils are constantly encouraged to help and look after each other and observe a strong moral code. The school's specialism has facilitated enhanced training and resourcing, both of which have contributed to improvements in teaching.

Communication with parents and carers is excellent; all say they feel that their children are well taught, that they are kept well informed about their children's progress and that they are given exceptional help to support their learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents, pupils and staff strongly support the view that on a day-to-day basis the school is a calm and settled community in which pupils feel safe and happy. This confirms what inspectors experienced. Misbehaviour is exceedingly rare and nearly always associated with personal trauma or clearly identified difficulties, often linked to autism spectrum disorders. There is no evidence of bullying, harassment or racism. In all lessons, pupils were seen to be behaving well, concentrating hard and trying their best. Pupils are strongly encouraged to do as much for themselves as they possibly can. For some, this is very limited but staff adopt the firm maxim, prominently displayed at the entrance to the school, 'We'll never do something for a child if he or she has a chance of doing it for him or herself'. This means that everything possible is done to foster independence and responsibility rather than

allowing pupils to remain over-reliant on adult support. Promotion of independence extends into independent travel programmes for some of the oldest pupils, thus giving them a sense of responsibility and freedom, as expressed by one who, during the inspection, had just made his first independent journey to school by train.

Pupils are given excellent support and advice about what could constitute an unsafe or hostile situation. This is hugely important for this highly vulnerable group. They are taught how to conduct themselves in different situations and how to avoid attracting unwelcome attention through the use of inappropriate language or responses.

The school itself is a very safe environment. All requirements for safeguarding are met and staff are exceptionally well trained and proficient in the safe handling of pupils and the preservation of their dignity. Pupils attend whenever they can. Nearly all absence is accounted for through ill health. The school has developed very precise and effective procedures to support pupils not well enough to attend school. These ensure that pupils stay safe and receive the support they need even though they are not in school.

Leadership and management

The school has a deservedly high reputation in the community. Parents and carers wax lyrical about the way it is helping their children. The local authority speaks of it in glowing terms. This is the second successive time it has been judged outstanding by Ofsted.

This acclaim testifies to the fact that leadership, management and governance are outstanding. The reason why pupils' achievement is so impressive is because they are exceptionally well taught. The quality of teaching is excellent as a result of leaders and managers relentlessly pursuing improvement. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is extensive, accurate and informative. It feeds information into an exceptionally well-developed programme of mentoring and training. All staff welcome the opportunities they are given to support pupils to greatest effect. Less experienced staff are especially appreciative of the help they are being given. More experienced staff have benefited from a forward-thinking governing body that has facilitated secondments to allow them to develop further leadership and management expertise. As a result, morale is high and all staff express pride in their contribution to the success of the school.

Highly detailed improvement planning involves all staff and takes good account of the views of parents, carers and, wherever possible, pupils. Appropriate priorities are identified and systematically addressed. These rarely involve major change because leaders and managers are particularly adept at addressing issues before they become problems. Pioneering, innovative work is being carried out to develop systems to support pupils not well enough to attend school and in the development of the communication curriculum. Facilitated through its specialism, the school has developed extensive and productive links with other schools that have contributed to many invaluable opportunities for Pear Tree and mainstream pupils to share experiences.

From the day they enter school to the day they leave, pupils enjoy seamless transition through an exciting, extensively well-enriched curriculum. Communication is at its heart and numeracy and literacy feature prominently. The glue that holds it together is the concerted approach to promoting pupils' personal development. Spirituality is fostered through the promotion of celebration and self-worth, morality through the expectation of high standards and consideration for each other and sociability through encouraging sharing and taking turns. There is strong promotion of equal opportunities and there is no discrimination. All safeguarding requirements are met.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



2 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Kirkham Pear Tree School, Preston, PR4 2HA

Hello again. I visited your school the other day. Some of you may remember. Thank you for making my visit so enjoyable.

You and your school are wonderful - outstanding.

None of you find learning easy but you try ever so hard and because of this, and because you are so well taught, you make outstanding progress.

You are polite and very well behaved. It was a joy to spend time with you. It was an experience I will not forget.

The people in charge of your school are doing a great job. They are keeping you safe and happy. They have made this a very, very special school.

Sometimes it is hard to put into words or numbers the progress some of you are making. Your staff are going to work extra hard to find a way round this.

Onwards and upwards; I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alastair Younger
Lead inspector

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