

Pictor School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106390
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	377393
Inspection dates	28–29 May 2012
Lead inspector	Brian Padgett HMI

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	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Shiv Chouksey
Headteacher	Jean Spruce
Date of previous school inspection	31 March 2009
School address	Grove Lane Timperley Altrincham WA15 6PH
Telephone number	0161 912 3082
Fax number	0161 904 7967
Email address	pictor.jspruce@traffordlearning.org



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Introduction

Inspection team

Brian Padgett
Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Fourteen lessons were observed taught by 14 teachers. All classes were observed, which included pupils from all years except those from Year 6, who were on a residential visit. Meetings were held with parents and carers, members of the governing body, staff and with health and social care professionals who work with the school. Inspectors observed an assembly, a choir practice and made a brief visit to the pupils on the residential. Inspectors examined school documentation, such as that for safeguarding and records of the progress pupils' make. Forty parental questionnaires were received. They were analysed along with responses from pupil and staff questionnaires.

Information about the school

Pictor School provides for children between the ages of 2 and 11 with a wide range of complex learning difficulties. The largest single category is that for pupils on the autistic spectrum, comprising nearly half of all the pupils. In addition, there are pupils with speech, communication and language difficulties, severe learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, physical difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Often, pupils have a combination of learning difficulties and/or medical conditions.

The great majority of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. However, the Early Years Foundation Stage also acts as an assessment centre for young children whose needs are being diagnosed. These children may eventually stay at Pictor or be placed elsewhere. Most pupils remain at the school for the duration of their primary schooling, although, occasionally, pupils join or leave at different times. Most pupils are boys and from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is high. However, the school serves the whole of Trafford and pupils' home circumstances fully reflect the varied socio-economic and diverse multicultural nature of the borough.

The school has achieved Activemark, Primary Quality Mark 2 and the Leading Parent Partnership Award, Healthy School status and the Financial Management Standard in Schools award.

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

- This is an outstanding special school. It provides exceptionally well for its pupils and their families. Pupils make outstanding progress in acquiring the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics and in acquiring the fundamental skills to communicate and cope with life's demands. Parents and carers are supported extremely well.
- The school has sustained and improved on its previous successes. This is because the school is exceptionally well led and managed and is constantly seeking ways of becoming ever more effective. Senior leaders are well supported by staff who willingly take on extra responsibilities and by an experienced and skilled governing body.
- Staff are extremely dedicated to the pupils. A high proportion are very experienced and highly qualified, including leaders in their fields of expertise. Teaching quality is outstanding, meeting individual needs very well. The school is purpose built and very well resourced, including accommodation for a wide range of on-site health professionals. The curriculum is exceptionally good, in its adaptation for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and in its creativity to make learning meaningful and fun.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This means pupils are well prepared to cope successfully in everyday social circumstances, where they need to communicate effectively and, for some, to manage their behaviours. One-hundred per cent of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire believed their children are safe and well cared for. They are particularly pleased with pupils' personal development and happiness at school.

What does the school need to do to improve further

There are no key issues for the school to address.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

The range of pupils' attainment when they enter the school is very broad. Many of the pupils have very low levels of attainment on entry. Others have near expected levels but such is the nature of their learning difficulties, particularly those on the autistic spectrum, they are unable to cope in a mainstream setting. These pupils often have profiles of attainment that are very uneven, accomplished in some aspects, very low in others.

Pupils make outstanding progress in developing their reading, writing and mathematics, especially in reading and in number. In reading, in 2011, about a half of Year 6 pupils reached Level 2 of the National Curriculum, the level typically reached by seven-year-olds, and exceptionally, above this. For other subjects, the majority of pupils attained lower levels, approaching Level 1 of the National Curriculum. Attainment in subjects and aspects of subjects varies. For example, attainment in number is often higher than in shape and some pupils are highly adept in using computers. This attainment represents at least good and often better progress, meeting and exceeding the challenging targets set by the school each year. At least good and often better progress is made in all years and for pupils from the whole range of learning needs.

Pupils' progress in overcoming the barriers to learning caused by their learning difficulties (in many cases, and particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage, in learning how to learn) is outstanding. For many pupils, although not all, it is not possible to see measureable progress within a lesson. However, over time, major strides are made in pupils' learning how to be with others, in sharing, in communicating and in managing anti-social behaviour. These aspects of learning represent huge improvements for these pupils. Parents and carers are particularly sensitive to achievement in these areas, as they transform family life, especially as staff are more than willing to support pupils and families in the home where requested. As an illustration of the degree of development in skills for life that the pupils achieve, the Year 6 pupils attending the residential visit, over a half of whom were on the autistic spectrum, some of those with additional learning needs, were able to live away from home, in the company of and sharing with others, tackling activities that required confidence and determination with support for them to overcome their anxieties.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is often outstanding and never less than good. Teachers have expert knowledge of teaching pupils with the range of learning difficulties, especially those on the autistic spectrum with additional needs. The curriculum and the

teaching of basic skills, including reading, are exceptionally well adapted to pupils' preferred learning styles. Lessons frequently involve much visual and auditory communication through pictures and song, a strong sensory element and a clear approach to behaviour, rewards and consequences. The quality of teamwork between teachers, teaching assistants and therapists is extremely high, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where much of the assessment of needs takes place. The physical environment and transition points during the day are managed very effectively and routines are very well established, maintaining a sense of order and calm for pupils. Benefiting from small numbers in each class, teachers know their pupils extremely well. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Staff are patient and caring. Teachers plan a varied range of activities for pupils based on their individual education plans and their monitoring and evaluation of progress achieved. Assessment of attainment and of the next steps is rigorous and pupils are often involved in assessing their learning. Every effort is made to engage and motivate pupils, to make learning fun and foster their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, during the week of the inspection, in addition to the residential for older pupils, lessons were based on children's literature and to teach pupils about the Queen's Jubilee celebrations. For both topics, staff sought to motivate pupils by using visual aids and props, and by getting dressed up as main characters to promote interest and encourage discussion. Visits out of school into the community are routine, to root learning in real life and to enable the development of communication skills with the public at large.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils feel safe. One hundred per cent of parents and carers responding to the parents' questionnaire said their children were safe at the school. Supervision is excellent and staff-to-pupil ratios are much more favourable than in a mainstream setting. The building is specifically designed to be safe for pupils and has been improved further since it was opened in 2002, as recognised in a recent external audit.

The behaviour and attitudes of most pupils are very good. For example, there are no recorded incidents of racial behaviour. Occasionally, because of the nature of their learning difficulties, some pupils display idiosyncratic behaviour, of a kind that means a mainstream school is not appropriate for them and which makes home life very difficult for parents and carers. As a result of staff knowledge, understanding and training, such pupils make excellent progress in developing strategies to manage their behaviour. Routines are so well established that the learning of others is not disturbed. Staff make their expertise available to parents and carers and, as a result, several parents and carers have become much more knowledgeable and confident in handling the difficult behaviour of their children. Home-school communication is excellent. This is particularly important, as nearly all pupils are escorted to school. Attendance is at about the level of that in mainstream primary schools, when taking into account the unavoidable absence of pupils on medical grounds.

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team of the school provides an outstanding vision and direction for the school. It has maintained exceptionally successful provision for the pupils

since the previous inspection and has outstanding capacity to sustain improvement. Leaders ensure the school has a friendly and welcoming ethos that puts parents and carers at ease. Their monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the school is exacting, in what they expect of staff, through performance management, and in the thoroughness with which they analyse pupils' progress. Such analyses invariably lead to action, such as the recent focus on improving pupils' knowledge and understanding of shape within mathematics.

Leadership is seen at all levels. Teachers take on leadership roles for different key stages, subjects and for a range of learning difficulties. Teaching assistants and support staff also take on significant responsibilities. The relationships with professionals from health and social care are excellent, ensuring effective communication between services. The net result of the effective delegation of responsibilities is a school of impressive teamwork and commitment to its aims. The governing body is highly experienced and well informed. It is rigorous in fulfilling its duties and members bring a wide range of skills to bear to support and challenge the school's leaders; for example, to justify additional expenditure.

The school's curriculum is outstanding, as it is exceptionally well adapted to the way in which the pupils learn. It fully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which, in turn, is outstanding.

The commitment of leaders to supporting and involving parents and carers, as one parent wrote to inspectors, goes 'above and beyond' any expectations. It is an integral part of the philosophy of the school to treat parents as full partners in the education of each pupil. In this they succeed outstandingly well, for example, in raising significantly the percentage of parents attending annual reviews and parents' evenings. Inspectors received many moving written statements from parents and carers of how their lives as well as their children's had been transformed through contact with the school. Parental support is well led, managed, funded and resourced.

Other partnerships are equally strong. The school liaises very effectively with a number of other special schools and mainstream schools, to receive pupils or to transfer them or simply to work together with them. In doing so they promote equality of opportunity and mutual respect and understanding extremely effectively. The arrangements for ensuring the safeguarding of pupils and of staff are extremely rigorous, including, for example, in maintaining a record of suitability checks on staff and visitors to the school, in assessing risk and in assuring child protection procedures.

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.



30 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pictor School, Altrincham, WA15 6PH

You may remember when, a few weeks ago, inspectors visited your school. We were based in Class 15 and had our pictures on the door of the classroom. We came to see how well you were learning. This letter is to explain to you what we found out.

We could see that, whatever difficulty you have with learning, you are doing really well. You are doing so well your parents and carers can hardly believe the progress you have made since you joined the school. You are doing very well with your reading, writing and mathematics. You enjoy school a great deal and are gaining the skills and confidence you will need to make the most of life in the future.

Because it has done so much for you and for your families, we have given the school our top grading of outstanding. It was graded outstanding on the last inspection. However, since then, we have made it even harder to achieve the top grade. So you have every reason to be very proud of your school.

You are taught and cared for by a very dedicated and expert team of teachers and support staff. They give you 100%. The school is in very safe hands. In particular, your headteacher and deputy headteacher make a strong and successful team, watching over the school, your progress and your welfare.

You will continue to face many challenges when you move to secondary school and when you leave school. You will have to continue to work as hard as you are doing now. For example, if you find it difficult to manage your behaviour, you will need to keep on practicing the strategies your teachers have taught you at Pictor. Wherever you move onto, I am sure you will remember your time at your primary school with great fondness.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector

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