

Hillside Special School for Autism Spectrum Disorder, Communication and Interaction

Ribchester Road, Longridge, Preston, PR3 3XB

Inspection dates 5–6 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Teachers are very skilled in helping students who cannot talk to communicate by other means.
- Parents are very happy about the way the school is helping their children and the way staff tell them how well their children are getting on.
- Everything possible is done to keep students safe; staff are very good at supporting students through moments of crisis and helping them to behave well.
- A lot is done to give students experiences that they would not get anywhere else.
- Nearly all students make good progress and achieve well; when they do not, the school is good at finding out the reasons and getting students back on track.
- The headteacher knows what is needed to make the school outstanding, especially by improving teaching; she works passionately to bring this about.
- Members of the governing body are very good at putting the needs of students at the top of their agenda. When considering issues they nearly always ask the question, 'So what's in it for our students?'

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding and there is still a little that requires improvement.
- Not enough is done to make sure that leadership and management responsibilities are shared equally.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed every class and saw all teachers at work. In total, parts of 13 lessons were observed.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, senior staff and a representative of the local authority.
- Many informal conversations were held with staff and students.
- The responses of 19 parents who completed the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account when considering judgements, as were responses to the school's own questionnaire to parents.
- Inspectors looked at students' work and data about their past and current progress.
- Documents relating to behaviour, safeguarding, attendance, school improvement and self-evaluation were looked at.

Inspection team

Alastair Younger, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Ellwood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is the local authority's specialist provision for students at the most extreme end of the autism range. These are young people who approach life in a different way to their peers. The school serves the whole of the county. Nearly all students have considerable learning difficulties in addition to their autism.
- Students can join the school at any age; they often arrive when they are very young.
- Just over a quarter of students are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding (extra money provided to schools by the government for students being looked after and those known to be eligible for free school meals); this is about average.
- There are many more boys than girls; most students are of White British heritage but there are growing numbers from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The school works with many other schools to help their staff develop skills that will help them to work with pupils with autism.
- There are well-advanced plans to extend the school to allow pupils to stay on until the age of 19.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Pursue the goal of making more teaching outstanding by:
 - encouraging staff to talk more and to encourage more spoken communication
 - finding more ways to get students working together and encouraging more socialising between pupils
 - making sure that all students, especially the more able, are always expected to work as hard as they can
 - making sure that teaching assistants are more fully involved in helping to raise standards.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - making sure that everyone with leadership and management duties understands what they are and how they relate to pay and status
 - making sure that school self-evaluation more accurately reflects where the school actually is rather than where it wants to be.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Attainment on entry is always low. This reflects students' special needs. Attainment is very likely to remain low, however much progress students make. Nevertheless, when everything is taken into account, students achieve well because they are helped to come to terms with, and sometimes partially overcome, their difficulties.
- In nearly all of the lessons seen by inspectors, students were making good progress. Often, this progress is most obvious in the way they learn how to communicate with adults and make themselves understood. By the time they leave, the most able students are gaining awards that recognise attainment well-below national expectations.
- Pupils react particularly well to the consistent routines provided by staff; many are reassured by the picture timetables that they use to chart the progress of their day. During the inspection, few pupils were seen speaking. Sometimes they choose not to and not enough encouragement and praise are given when they do speak.
- All students are set targets that take into account what they have achieved in the past and what they can realistically be expected to achieve in future if they work hard. Most of these targets are met but not many are exceeded and a few are missed. Occasionally, the most able students are not given hard enough work.
- Teachers have got much better at checking the progress that students are making. These checks show that within any class different groups of students make very similar progress. These groups include boys and girls, students from different minority ethnic backgrounds or those supported through pupil premium funding.
- The outreach team works effectively to help many pupils in other schools gain access to increasingly skilled support and also to help Hillside students to spend some time in mainstream schools.

The quality of teaching is good

- Most teaching is good. Inspectors did not see as much outstanding teaching as was predicted by leaders and managers. There is a very small amount of teaching that requires improvement.
- Teachers cope very well with frequent outbursts of unpredictable behaviour. Teaching assistants are very well briefed. Staff understand the importance of supporting behaviour rather than having to manage it.
- Teachers are highly sensitive to students' individual needs. Most plan very carefully to take into account these different needs. As a result, students' stress is kept to a minimum as they face realistic new challenges. Very occasionally, work is not hard enough for the most able students, such as when one had made his model galleon from clay before the task had been fully explained by the teacher.
- Students are nearly always heavily and sensitively supported. Most teachers organise this support well. There are times when the balance between supporting learning in addition to behaviour slips too far towards the latter. Particularly useful support was seen when a teaching assistant was making perceptive notes about the tiny, but hugely important, signs of progress being made by a student.
- Teachers are especially skilled in helping students to communicate. This is often through the use of signs, symbols, pictures and signing. The use of these systems is very consistently and expertly promoted. Occasionally though, not enough attention is paid to getting students to speak, especially to each other. Too many lessons are conducted in relative silence.
- In their successful efforts to support the acute needs of pupils and to maintain safety in the classroom, teachers occasionally play too safe. No examples, for instance, were seen of students being asked to work together to solve problems. Inspectors realise that this is something that

they either cannot or will not do. When it is the latter of these, staff sometimes pander to students' needs rather than address them.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The nature of students' special needs means that they are often unable to control their own behaviour or to understand what personal safety means. Given this though, they try very hard.
- It is rare for lessons to be seriously interrupted. There are many spontaneous outbursts, often loud and threatening. These cannot be thought of as misbehaviour: they are examples of the extreme difficulties that Hillside students face. Incidents such as these are very well managed by staff and usually totally ignored by other students.
- Parents are happy that their children are being very well looked after and kept safe. They know that staff are particularly well trained to meet their children's physical needs.
- Students attend well. Attendance is higher than in mainstream schools. Any absence is very promptly checked up on. This is to find out the reason and to ensure that absent students are safe.
- In recent years there have been no exclusions, no instances of racist, sexist or homophobic intimidation and no bullying. The number of serious incidents keeps reducing year-on-year.
- Students are not given enough opportunities, nor are they sufficiently encouraged, to relate to each other. Some get on well with adults but there is very little evidence of them getting on with each other. At playtimes, they usually choose isolation rather than company. This is very much the way they are but more could be done to promote alternatives.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher shows total dedication to the school and a strong desire to help its students. When necessary, she takes too much on rather than sharing out responsibilities among the staff who are being paid well to do them. The important thing is that whoever does the duties does them conscientiously and well.
- Leaders and managers focus very strongly on helping staff to gain better insights into how students who have a different approach to life than most of us exist. An extensive programme of training is in place for all staff. A lot of this relates to behaviour and safety but promoting learning is not ignored and this contributes to helping raise standards. All staff are set realistic targets for improvement each year and it is only through fully meeting these targets that staff gain promotion and get paid more.
- As a result of good leadership and management, teaching is good. Standing in the way of further improvement is the fact that some think it is better because self-evaluation is occasionally not sufficiently critical of the current performance of the school, rather than where it would like to be. Several new teachers have been appointed since the previous inspection. They have developed well because they have been well mentored by senior staff.
- There is a good curriculum. Communication is strongly promoted. The headteacher passionately pursues opportunities to give students more opportunities to expand their horizons and confront parental reservations about what their children can do. During the inspection all Key Stage 3 students visited a local theatre. Plans are in place to visit York and to take students abroad. These are all events that most parents and many other professionals would scarcely dream of for this group of students.
- The local authority has a very good understanding of the quality of service this school provides to its students. It provides good support and advice without over-interfering. Members of the governing body have very much appreciated training provided by the local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is particularly good because members of the governing body ask the right

questions. These nearly always revolve around checking whether the school is making students' lives better and safer. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and where improvements need to be made. There are rather a lot of members for a school of this size. The Chair of the Governing Body acknowledges this and shows determination to ensure that everyone who stands on it serves a purpose in school improvement and understands what it is.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	131479
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	402469

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	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Griffin
Headteacher	Alison Foster
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 2010
Telephone number	01772 782205
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