

Presfield High School and Specialist College

Preston New Road, Churchtown, Southport, Merseyside, PR9 8PA

Inspection dates 13–14 March 2013

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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is good. Students achieve well because they are well taught, they are keen to learn and they attend regularly.
- Teaching is good. Teachers are very sensitive to individual student's needs. They are helped in classrooms by some very skilled teaching assistants.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Most of the time the school is very calm and settled. Students develop outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities. Attendance is well above average. Students feel very safe.
- Leadership, management and governance are good. The headteacher is exceptional and is hugely admired by parents, staff, governors and the local authority.
- The good leadership and management of teaching and learning have helped staff who were more used to teaching students with moderate learning difficulties to adapt well to teaching those with autism.
- The school keeps improving. Change has been managed exceptionally well and standards of attainment keep rising.
- The sixth form is good. It is well suited to meeting the needs of those students who do not transfer to college at the end of Year 11.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching. Sometimes expectations of what students can achieve are not high enough, especially for the most able students and sometimes lessons are not made sufficiently memorable.
- Last year, all teachers met all of their targets for improvement yet teaching remains good rather than outstanding. This points to some targets not being challenging enough. A few targets are not clearly enough linked to raising standards of attainment.

Information about this inspection

- Fourteen lessons were observed. One jointly with the headteacher. Nearly all teachers were seen and all groups of students.
- Meetings were held with two governors, a representative of the local authority and with senior staff.
- Regular discussions were held with the headteacher. Many informal discussions were held with other staff and with students.
- Inspectors took into account the views of parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). They also looked at the results of the school's own surveys of parent and student views.
- Many staff completed questionnaires and their views and comments were also taken into account. Inspectors looked at samples of students' work and information about their progress. Documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and school improvement were also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Alastair Younger, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Ellwood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a school for students with autism; many also have moderate learning difficulties (MLD).
- The school's designation changed shortly after its last inspection. Up until then it had been a school for students who primarily had MLD but also displayed signs of autism. The few remaining students designated as primarily MLD are due to leave at the end of this year.
- The school serves the whole of the borough so students come from a huge range of backgrounds.
- Many students have additional difficulties relating to learning, medical and physical needs and specific language difficulties.
- There are about five times as many boys as girls; this is not uncommon in a school such as this. Nearly all students are White British. There are currently no looked after children. Twelve students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (extra government money for those known to be eligible for free school meals, being looked after or being the children of armed forces personnel)
- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school is currently working towards National Autistic Society accredited status and achieved Specialist Status (communication and interaction) in 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to the point where much of it is outstanding by:
 - making sure that all teachers recognise the ability of all students and set all of them work that challenges them to the full all of the time. This applies mainly to the highest attaining students.
 - making sure that every opportunity is taken to bring lessons to life and make learning more memorable.
- Improve leadership, management and governance by making sure that all targets for improvement set for individual teachers are sufficiently challenging and clearly lay down the expectation of outstanding teaching and a resultant raising of standards of attainment.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students achieve well. Their parents are very happy with the progress they make. Students say they work hard and are happy with their results. In lessons, students can be seen to be trying hard, being well taught and making good progress.
- Attainment is below average because of the nature of students' needs and difficulties. Higher-attaining students often leave at the end of Year 11 to continue their studies in colleges.
- Students with greater difficulties benefit from the way the sixth form continues to nurture them and helps them to cope with their concerns about leaving school and moving on to training opportunities at a later age.
- Students are very well prepared for the next stage in their education or transfer to other settings to prepare them for adult life. This is greatly helped by the school's openness and enthusiasm to involve parents and students at every stage when suggesting the best possible alternatives.
- On entry to the school nearly all students are working well below national expectations but within National Curriculum levels. Many students transfer into the school other than at the start of Year 7, usually when it has become obvious that they are not thriving in mainstream schools.
- By the end of Year 11 all pupils have gained qualifications that represent good progress from individual starting points. A good range of courses leading to qualifications and awards is offered to older students. Last year, over a half of all Year 11 students left with at least five GCSE's and all with at least five passes at entry level (a qualification that recognises attainment at a level below the lower grades of GCSE).
- The school checks the progress of individuals very closely. These checks show that no students are let down and all have equal opportunities to learn. It is often very difficult to check the relative progress of different groups of pupils because these groups often have a single representative. Nevertheless, it is clear that no group of students underperforms or is in any way discriminated against.
- The school recognises that to become outstanding more students are going to have to make even faster progress and that this will require outstanding teaching.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students are well taught. They are never let down by teaching that is not good enough but not enough teaching is sufficiently outstanding to consistently help students to exceed their own, their parent's and the school's expectations. In all instances it is very clear that teachers form good relationships with students and that students respect them.
- Some perfectly 'solid' lessons are weakened by the fact that they contain not enough that is truly memorable. There are a lot of facts, there are a lot of words on interactive whiteboards and teachers talk a lot. Opportunities are missed to bring learning to life and make it more relevant; such as when the importance of churches to Christians made little of the fact that the night before the lesson a new Pope had been elected.
- Teaching assistants often contribute a lot to lessons. They show a very good awareness of the idiosyncrasies of pupils and are very quick to use their initiative when troubles could arise. Even more importantly, they support learning strongly. There are occasions, particularly during the introductions to lessons, when they are not deployed effectively enough.
- Teachers recognise that there is a fine balance between teaching and classrooms that best serve students with autism. They have nearly mastered the art but there is still a bit of room to increase the excitement factor and introduce a little more stimulus in classrooms. In one of the best lessons seen, students were totally involved in choosing preferred items of 'food' from a table where they were displayed in all their plastic glory! They knew that at the end of term they were going to get the real thing if they got it right. The joy of the lesson was that it was all done in French and the students lived the experience; they applauded one another's efforts and

supported each other.

- A lot has been asked of teachers since the last inspection. Most were appointed as teachers to attend the needs of MLD students, now they are being asked to be experts in the field of autism. They are doing very well and standards of attainment are rising. This improvement could be accelerated if all teachers recognised that the nature of students learning difficulties has changed radically over recent years. There are increasing numbers of students who have precocious talents in some areas that are easily masked by huge inadequacies in others. An example here is the student who has no problems with number work, but finds solving problems difficult being given 20 number calculations in a lesson. Crucially, there was no opportunity to address his weakness in problem solving.
- Although individual needs are usually well met, there are occasional lapses and higher-attaining students are not always given hard enough work. This happens when teachers misinterpret the idea of 'extension work' as being 'more of the same'. This happened in an English lesson where students were learning how to use a glossary. When a student quickly completed the original task, just as quickly, the 'extension task' she was given was a book to read.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- This is a strength of the school and defines its outstanding ethos. Students are given every opportunity to develop their personal skills and are strongly supported to do so. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is given the highest possible priority as a way to help them to achieve success and fulfilment in later life.
- To any independent observer it is clear that on a day-to-day basis, behaviour is of the highest standard. Many have commented on this over the past two years and it was clearly evident during the inspection. On the very rare occasions this is not the case the reason is nearly always accounted for by personal crises that are clearly linked to students' autism. There is virtually no exclusion, no bullying and no sexist behaviour.
- Students accept each other for what they are and are kind and friendly to one another. Many have transferred from other places when it became clear that they did not feel this same sense of security and where this was affecting their well-being and progress. Here, the overwhelming majority say they feel safe and have friends.
- Behaviour in lessons is nearly always exemplary. This can occasionally hide lapses in attitude. Few students ask for harder work when they know that what they have been given is too easy and not enough ask for help when work is too hard.
- Attendance is exemplary. It far exceeds that found in similar schools and also exceeds that found in mainstream secondary schools. Over a half of pupils this year are recording 100% attendance and there is only a handful who have serious attendance issues, nearly always easily explained and always promptly followed up.

The leadership and management are good

- Despite significant changes in the role of the school, leaders, managers and governors have maintained past standards and in many ways improved upon them. There is clear evidence of rising standards and improving behaviour. There are likely to be changes at senior and middle management levels in the near future but the potential impact of this is being well managed. At the heart of the school's success is an exceptional headteacher.
- Very importantly, in respect of its specialist status, the school plays an important part in introducing college students who are training to be teachers to the opportunities available to them in teaching students with special educational needs.
- Teachers are strongly encouraged to improve their understanding of their jobs. Professional development opportunities are of high quality, including support for staff who seek higher

qualifications, such as the three who are currently working towards higher degrees in education. Twenty staff have gained external accreditation in working with children with autistic spectrum conditions over the past three years, thus showing the school's commitment to its changed designation.

- The policy for the checking of teachers' effectiveness and improvement has recently been revised to raise expectations. Leaders and managers are very aware of the fact that if the school is to become outstanding then teaching has to be outstanding. Last year, every teacher met every target they were set for improvement. If every student had met every target they were set this would have tended to highlight the fact that the targets were not demanding enough. At issue is the fact that too many objectives are judged on the way they improve provision rather than in the way they help to raise standards.
- The curriculum is good. The very high attendance of students demonstrates that they think that what they are being offered is worthwhile and the evidence of inspection supports this. There is a growing programme of curriculum enrichment that is opening up opportunities that students and their parents never thought they could access, such as stays away from home, opportunities to show their worth in work experience placements and the growing fostering of independence.
- The local authority provides light touch support for this good school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

Governors support the school passionately but not unconditionally. They are proud of it and want it to become one of the best. They have strong links with parents, listen to them carefully and make sure that their views about strengths and weaknesses are made well known to leaders and managers. Governors are well informed about the quality of teaching and the processes of training and managing the performance of staff. They take care to monitor the school's safeguarding operations to ensure they meet the highest standards. They are acutely aware of how extra money provided to the school's budget through the pupil premium is spent and to what effect. Finance is very carefully managed and the governing body shows a good awareness of how subtle staffing changes can make big changes in the efficiency of the school.

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	104977
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	400746

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gordon Ross
Headteacher	Gaynor Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2009
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