

Peak School

Buxton Road, Chinley, High Peak, SK23 6ES

Inspection dates 10–11 July 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.

- The headteacher's dedication to equal opportunities means each pupil gets the same chances to succeed.
- Staff are overwhelmingly supportive of senior leaders, who in turn, make sure that staff have the help they need to do the best for each pupil.
- Pupils make good and often better progress, whatever their difficulties.
- Teaching is usually good. Occasionally, it is outstanding.
- The sixth form is good. The new facilities have increased the opportunities open to students.
- Pupils with extremely challenging behaviour are helped to make significant improvements.
- Behaviour by the vast majority of pupils is exemplary. They enjoy their lessons and feel safe.
- The school works successfully with parents. As one explained, 'It's the whole family that goes to school, not just the child.'
- Governors have the right skills and knowledge to help the school improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers, especially those in charge of subjects, do not have enough responsibility to check the quality of teaching or analyse data about pupils' progress.
- The best teachers do not share their outstanding practice enough with colleagues.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not have a wide enough range of play activities available to them to excel in all areas of learning.
- Work is not always set at the right level for the pupils when working together as a class.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed nine lessons, all of which were seen together with the headteacher. She also visited some parts of lessons, looked at pupils' work, heard pupils read and joined them at lunch time. A visit was also made to the children's home.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and other school leaders as well as a representative of the local authority, governors and a group of pupils. The inspector also talked to two parents, the school nurse and staff responsible for the Movement Opportunities Via Education (MOVE) programme.
- The inspector took note of the 13 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). She also took into consideration the school's own questionnaires for parents and other people connected with the school.
- The inspector examined a range of documents about the school's work, including records about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety as well as about staff performance.

Inspection team

Debra McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Peak School is a small all-age special school for pupils with statements of special educational needs, for severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorder. There are a small number of pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. About a quarter of the pupils have extremely challenging behaviour.
- The school changed its status from a special residential to a day school in February 2012, when the residential block was replaced by a social care run children's home. This means there is an above-average number of pupils looked after by the local authority.
- The school shares its site and catering facilities with a social-care adult training centre.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British and speak English as their first language.
- A large number of pupils are in the sixth form.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding for particular groups of pupils). This funding applies to pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority or have a parent in the armed services.
- Sixth form pupils attend Buxton College for one day per week to learn about information and communication technology.
- The school has just gained the MOVE Assurance Quality Mark.
- The school operates an outreach service for pupils in mainstream education with autism spectrum disorder.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by:
 - increasing the amount of outstanding teaching, by giving the very best teachers opportunities to spend time supporting their colleagues and sharing their ideas, so that their teaching becomes outstanding too
 - making sure that teachers always set work at the right level for pupils in whole-class sessions
 - giving more responsibility to teachers in charge of subjects to check regularly how well their subject is taught across the school, and for them to be more involved in how data about pupils' progress in their subject is used
 - make sure that the planned changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage are put in place first thing in the autumn term, so that a greater range of stimulating activities and opportunities is available to children straightaway.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress across all subjects and all key stages compared to similar pupils nationally. Sometimes their progress towards the challenging targets set by senior leaders is outstanding.
- The school knows how well pupils do because of the meticulous way that senior leaders record their progress. They use the information effectively to make sure they find out if any pupils are doing less well than they should be in any particular subject, so they can sort out any problems. This information is regularly checked and shared with other schools to make sure that it is accurate. Pupils are made aware of how well they are doing in class.
- The data that has been collected shows that every individual and group of pupils, such as those with severe or profound multiple learning difficulties, makes the same good or better progress. This includes pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, who benefit from increased one-to-one support and opportunities to boost their confidence and self-esteem through outward-bound and sporting activities. This helps them do better in class, particularly those pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There were not enough pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in 2012 to comment on their attainment without identifying them.
- Students in the sixth form are already benefiting from the improved facilities provided by the refurbished sixth form block. They are able to follow useful and practical courses that lead to relevant qualifications. Opportunities to learn about information and communication technology at Buxton College add to their wide-ranging curriculum.
- The school correctly identified that expectations for some more-able pupils' writing could be higher and the way writing is taught has been changed. More opportunities for 'free writing' and writing for specific purposes, such as making shopping lists, has led to remarkable progress for some of these pupils.
- Pupils have opportunities to read across a range of subjects, whatever their ability. Students in sixth form use symbolised checklists to make sure that they have all the ingredients they need for their food technology lesson, while children in the Early Years Foundation Stage use symbols and objects to choose the next song.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a good start to their education, but they do not excel because they do not yet have access to a wide enough range of stimulating play activities.
- Pupils make good progress in their reading. Personalised reading books are used to motivate pupils who show little interest in ordinary books, while others are able to choose from a range of reading schemes and practise reading within the daily routine of the classroom. However, the way progress is checked and recorded is not yet specific enough to detail the very small improvements pupils make over time.
- The school has struggled of late to find worthwhile work placements for pupils outside of school. However, it has made sure that pupils have access to suitable opportunities within the improved facilities in school. Good links with the social-care adult training centre mean the refurbished garden centre provides even more chances for useful work experience.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is mostly good and very occasionally outstanding, providing enjoyable and worthwhile experiences for pupils.
- Although classes are grouped roughly according to key stage, pupils are mostly taught alongside those who share similar ways of learning. For example, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties took part in a sensory story where they could hear, feel, see and touch materials about the seaside, as well as join in the storytelling using switches.
- Teachers generally plan work that is based on how well pupils have done previously. For example, in one sixth-form lesson, pupils prepared sandwiches for their packed lunches with different levels of help, depending on how well they had managed before.
- Where teaching is most effective, tasks and activities are planned exactly to match the level pupils are working at and the speed of the lesson is just right to give pupils time to respond. Teaching assistants are used well to support pupils' learning and to record their progress, and staff work together well to plan the next steps that pupils need to take to move their learning on.
- Teachers use a variety of ways to help pupils communicate. Very young children in the Early Years Foundation Stage choose the next song in music from a symbol songbook, while sixth formers use symbolised checklists to make sure they have the right ingredients for their food technology lesson. Promoting pupils' ability to learn to do things for themselves is given a strong focus.
- Information and communications technology is generally used well to include pupils fully in lessons. In one outstanding lesson, where pupils were practising early drawing skills, one pupil excitedly used a touch screen to 'paint' a picture in the style of Jackson Pollock and another used the interactive whiteboard to successfully make marks.
- Signing is mostly used well to support teachers' instructions and to encourage pupils to make choices. Questioning is generally used effectively to check what pupils have understood.
- Pupils learn to use mathematical skills in a variety of practical ways. In one class for pupils with very challenging behaviour, they learnt about subtraction by first playing skittles and then recording the sum pictorially on a worksheet.
- Teachers make sure that pupils have opportunities to practise writing and reading skills throughout the day.
- Teaching is particularly strong when pupils are taught on a one-to-one basis. Sometimes, when teachers are working with the class all together, they do not give them different pieces of work, so that, occasionally. Pupils may have tasks that are either too easy or too hard.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The vast majority of pupils behave well around the school and because, behaviour is so carefully managed, behaviour in lessons is exemplary, considering the challenges a large number of pupils experience. Very well thought-out strategies make sure that pupils continue to make significant

progress with their behaviour, pushing them that little bit further with each success. This means the best possible use is made of their time in class.

- The school admits pupils who can display very challenging, sometimes violent behaviour. Some of these have been excluded from other special schools or spent time in secure units run by the health authority. However, the excellent input from highly skilled senior leaders means that staff are given first-class support and training to help these pupils begin to overcome their difficulties. This means that the vast majority make significant improvements in their behaviour.
- Because staff are so well supported, morale at the school is high and staff have created an environment that is positive and nurturing, where pupils can feel safe and secure, thus reducing their anxiety levels. The health and safety of pupils is the utmost priority and pupils say they feel safe and that there is no bullying.
- The school seeks creative ways to help those pupils remain in school who have previously had difficulties and will 'go the extra mile' to find solutions. For example, staff have worked closely with their colleagues at the children's home to produce an educational package to enable particularly challenging pupils to receive an education and make slow but important progress.
- There have been no permanent exclusions and fixed-term temporary exclusions have been used on only the rarest of occasions to give the school time to make necessary changes to available resources before a pupil returns.
- Senior leaders rigorously check patterns of pupils' behaviour and keep meticulous records, so that behaviour plans can be quickly put into place, changed or support given if the need arises. Staff show great understanding of the causes of pupils' distress or anxiety, so that they are able to implement effectively the well thought-out behaviour plans that help pupils to manage their behaviour better.
- The school works very closely with other agencies such as social care, health and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, to secure the best outcomes for pupils with complex behaviour or health needs. The full-time school nurses are readily available to make sure that pupils receive care of the highest standard and to see that the training that staff receive is thorough. They also act as a further port of call for pupils who may have health or emotional worries and to provide additional back-up for the well-established procedures in school to keep children safe.
- The school encourages good attendance and follows up any absence assiduously. This has made sure that attendance has increased over the past few years and is now broadly in line with the national average.

The leadership and management are good

- Together with other senior leaders, the headteacher and deputy headteacher provide strong leadership for the school. Their high expectations are shared by staff, who are extremely supportive.
- The school has undergone many changes in recent years, including its transformation from a residential to day school. Senior leaders and governors have managed this exceptionally well to make sure that the day-to-day running of the school has been uninterrupted and that pupils' education has not suffered. Students, especially those in sixth form, are now able to reap the benefits of the improved facilities.

- The increased complexity of many of the pupils who attend the school has provided senior leaders with a set of particular challenges that they have embraced wholeheartedly, as has the whole school. The school works exceptionally well with parents and carers and allows no obstacles to get in the way of building effective relationships.
- The school's success in working effectively with pupils with autism spectrum disorders and other pupils whose behaviour can be extremely challenging, has raised its profile considerably within the local authority, providing outreach support to pupils with similar difficulties in mainstream schools.
- Teachers in charge of subjects do not have enough opportunity to develop their leadership skills, such as checking the quality of teaching and analysing data so that they can play a more significant role in school improvement.
- Although senior leaders regularly check the quality of teaching, the very best teaching is not shared enough with colleagues to increase the amount of teaching that is outstanding.
- The school provides a range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural opportunities, both through visits to communities with a more multicultural feel and through inviting guest speakers from local religious groups. Theatre companies add to pupils' experiences in school, while outdoor pursuits such as 'river walking' offer challenge and inspiration.
- Experienced and appropriate support from the local authority has helped senior leaders continue to identify and make school improvements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body provides effective challenge and support to school leaders from a position of sound knowledge about the school's performance data and a range of relevant skills and expertise.
 - Governors have responded robustly to the financial implications of the change in status from a residential to a day school and have made sure that appropriate measures have been taken to give the school financial stability. They are in tune with how well teachers are doing and the relationship between this and their pay. They set challenging targets for the headteacher and other staff to improve their performance and know how any underperformance is tackled. They are fully aware of the impact of pupil premium funding on those pupils who are eligible for it. They make sure that all the requirements for safeguarding children are met.

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	113039
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	401335

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	53
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Gregory
Headteacher	Linda Scowcroft
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2009
Telephone number	01663 750324
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