

# Blackmarston School

Honddu Close, Hereford, HR2 7NX

**Inspection dates** 25-26 September 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make rapid progress. They delight in intensive, well-focused interactions with staff.
- Pupils' achievement is good throughout the school. Teachers encourage communication in many ways and involve pupils in enjoyable activities that match their individual needs.
- There is little difference between the achievement of those entitled to pupil premium and others.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They are proud of their new school, having been well involved in its development.
- Pupils very much enjoy being in school. They have great trust in committed staff all of whom give them a strong feeling of security and belonging.
- Despite the disruption caused by building work, strong leadership and excellent teamwork have ensured that the school's high standards have not been compromised.
- Pupils' progress and teachers' practice are carefully checked to make sure that all pupils make good progress.
- The school works closely with families and other professionals. It helps other schools to teach their pupils who have disabilities and special educational needs.
- Governors are supportive, knowledgeable and increasingly challenging.
- Safeguarding has a high profile. The school works well with parents and carers on e-safety.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The most-able pupils are not always challenged. Teachers do not always check their pupil's progress throughout lessons.
- Girls do not do as well as boys in writing.
- Plans for improving the school are not always clearly focused on raising achievement and improving teaching.
- Teachers in charge of subjects and areas do not help their colleagues to improve their practice by observing their lessons.
- The full capacity of the new school's facilities, particularly computer technology, has not yet been realised.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 12 lessons, five of which were joint observations with the headteacher and her deputy.
- Inspectors talked to a group of pupils on the first day of the inspection and spoke informally to others throughout the inspection. Pupils' work from each key stage was examined and pupils were heard reading.
- Eighteen submissions to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were examined. In addition the inspector took account of the school's own surveys from parents and carers. Returns from 19 questionnaires completed by staff were also considered.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body, including the Chairs and the safeguarding governor, and the local authority. Meetings were also held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, and teachers in charge of subjects and areas.
- Inspectors evaluated documentation regarding pupils' current progress, the curriculum, development plans, as well as procedures and records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

## Inspection team

Kathy Hooper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Rowena Green	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a small special school for children with profound and severe learning difficulties. It also educates pupils with complex needs, including those with a diagnosis of autism.
- A relatively high proportion of pupils join the school from other schools including mainstream.
- Almost all pupils are White British and there is a very small proportion of pupils from minority ethnic families.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- An above average proportion of pupils are eligible for pupil premium (pupils known to be entitled to free school meals, children looked after by the local authority or other groups).
- The school does not place any of its pupils with an alternative provider. However, pupils sometimes attend others schools, with support, in preparation for their re-integration into mainstream education.
- Over the last two years, the school has been re-built on the original site and was still incomplete at the time of the inspection.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
  - the most able are consistently challenged
  - teachers regularly check the progress that pupils make throughout all lessons
  - girls have wider opportunities to improve their writing.
- Ensure that monitoring systems evaluate the impact of actions by:
  - sharpening the focus on pupils' achievement
  - using pupil progress data to set precise targets for teachers' appraisal
  - extending opportunities for teachers in charge of subjects and areas to observe and discuss their colleagues' lessons.
- Develop the use of the enhanced computer technology:
  - to support the pupils' achievement
  - to record pupils' progress
  - by having clear objectives for using of the light and dark rooms.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Children joining the school in the Nursery make huge improvements. They are stimulated by animated staff and enjoyable activities that encourage them to make choices and do as much as possible for themselves. The most able are encouraged to distinguish their photograph from a choice of two. Children are very excited by their achievements and their confidence grows.
- Pupils make good progress throughout the school and some make outstanding progress. Pupils who join the school other than at the usual times, often with a history of failure, gain confidence from their successes. As a result, they make better progress than in previous settings. Others achieve sufficiently well to move to mainstream settings.
- Pupils entitled to pupil premium make almost as much progress as others. The school makes every effort to ensure that families are engaged in their child's learning through joint activities in school and using switches to encourage choices at home. Pupils are helped to overcome personal barriers to learning by working closely with learning mentors.
- Pupils from minority ethnic groups make good progress. Those whose first language is not English are well supported through the use of symbols, signing, Braille and speech to support their communication.
- Children with little cognitive ability on entry are enabled to interact purposefully. By the end of Key Stage 1, the most-able pupils are using symbols to make sentences and by the end of Key Stage 2, they are reading regularly and sounding out words. Some pupils with a diagnosis of autism make enough progress to work productively with others.
- Pupils' reading is stronger than their writing; their achievement in number is stronger than other aspects of mathematics. Girls' writing is not as strong as that of boys. Some of the most-able pupils do not make as much progress as they might in lessons because activities provided do not always stretch them.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection. It is well focused, practical and relevant. Pupils' individual needs are well addressed through individual and small group work. Communication is a strong feature of the teaching. Signing, symbols and Braille are used in addition to lots of language in all activities. Very skilled teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage enables children to make good progress and some of them make outstanding progress.
- In an outstanding lesson about the Second World War for pupils at the top end of Key Stage 2, pupils were reluctant to stop working because the activities were so well matched to their needs. Some of them understood that parents and evacuees felt very sad when they were separated. They were beginning to understand the differences between life at that time and now.
- Teaching assistants are well involved in pupils' learning. They ask probing questions and encourage pupils to be as independent as possible. In lessons seen, they ensured that learning was made more relevant by asking questions that helped pupils to put the learning into context. For example, when pupils learned to recognise a new word, they used it in a sentence.
- Adults listen well to pupils and skilfully question them during activities, tailoring their questions

to individual abilities. Just occasionally, pupils' learning is not checked and extended as the lesson progresses. The most-able pupils are not always challenged and their learning is not extended.

- Pupils' speaking and listening are well developed in lessons. Their ability to understand words and read is well taught and those who are able to read take books home to practise. Pupils' understanding of numeracy is well reinforced across the curriculum.
- Difficulties with computer technology in the new facilities at the time of the inspection limited the degree to which pupils used it to learn. Nevertheless, some Year 4 pupils understood the differences between morning and afternoon because they had used tablets to capture activities that took place at these times. Although the school boasts state-of-the-art light and dark rooms, their use in enabling cognitive development is currently limited because of the recency of its installation and lack of training.
- Teachers keep records of pupils' engagement in activities and assess their progress regularly, but their annotations do not always identify exactly what progress has been made.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They are extremely proud of their growing skills. Early Years Foundation Stage children were delighted to be able to recognise their own pictures and Key Stage 2 pupils were thrilled to read to a visitor.
- Any disruptive behaviour due to pupils' special needs is competently managed. There is a consistent approach to positive behaviour management throughout the school.
- There are often a lot of smiles in lessons because pupils are stimulated by the activities and delighted by their success. They are spurred on by their increasing independence and develop high levels of confidence to try new experiences. They respond extremely well to staff. There are warm and supportive relationships and high levels of trust. Some pupils addressed the whole school during an achievement assembly.
- Pupils have been fully engaged in the new building works. Opportunities were provided to allow them to watch the large machinery. Builders put Perspex windows into temporary walls to allow pupils to see what was happening; this was very much appreciated by pupils and made a valuable contribution to their progress in communication skills. Pupils have been consulted about decisions regarding their new school, where appropriate, and are currently discussing the development of the playground.
- The vast majority of parents and carers believe that their children are encouraged to learn and develop life skills for the future. They are extremely happy with their children's experiences at the school.
- There is outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. High levels of excitement and enjoyment in lessons and assemblies, together with a wide range of extra-curricular activities, promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceedingly well.
- Pupils' attendance is good because they want to come to school. They say that the staff are kind and helpful. They understand the need to be kind to each other and, as far as possible, they are very supportive of each other. They have a clear understanding of the school rules and routines.

They take a full and active part in assemblies, enthusiastically joining in with singing and listening attentively to bible stories.

- Both pupils and their parents and carers are fully involved in anti-bullying initiatives. The most able understand that they should look after people. They know they must be kind to others and not hurt anyone. They know that if someone annoys them or is thoughtless, they should move away and report to staff who will promptly address the problem.
- Great emphasis is placed on e-safety and parents and carers are well engaged in discussions about the danger of unsupervised access to the internet. Safety issues are discussed with pupils as far as possible. The new building is very secure and pupils feel safe.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The senior leadership team provides clear direction for the school. The new build has been achieved without compromising pupils' standards. The difficulties encountered have galvanised the staff into a strong team with high morale. There is a detailed understanding of the progress of each pupil. As result, any underachievement is quickly identified and addressed.
- The building is purpose built and well equipped. At the time of the inspection, there were still technical problems around the use of computer technology, and the accommodation for Early Years Foundation Stage was incomplete. The headteacher and her deputy have been tireless in maintaining close oversight of developments, insisting on the highest possible provision.
- There are close working relationships with a range of outside agencies who support the development of pupils' physical, cognitive and psychological needs. Staff work well in partnership with them and some staff have speech and language training.
- Assessments are rigorous and moderated with representatives of the local authority and with mainstream schools. The local authority provides a light touch, but is responsive when approached by the school.
- There is a good system for appraising the work of teachers. However, pupil progress data is not used to determine specific targets for raising pupils' achievement.
- Teachers in charge of subjects and areas of the school's work are actively involved in advising colleagues on ways to develop their practice, but they do not yet evaluate the impact of their efforts. Although they do not yet observe lessons, a schedule is in place for this to start this term. The Early Years Foundation Stage is competently led and thoughtfully managed.
- The curriculum is engaging, rich, relevant and under continuous development. It is well extended through extra-curricular experiences. There is a strong cross-curricular emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Although the primary sports funding for physical development has not yet been allocated, the school has a good range of activities that address pupils' physical needs well. A plan is in place for extending provision later in the term when this extra funding is available.
- The school's considerable expertise in teaching pupils with disabilities and special educational needs is shared with other schools through outreach support. This service is greatly appreciated, but is not yet evaluated in terms of its impact on pupils' progress except at an anecdotal level.
- Safeguarding is taken very seriously: policies and guidance are in place, staff are well trained

and aware. The new school provides increased security and risk assessments are appropriately carried out. Work on e-safety with parents and carers is ongoing.

- The school engages parents and carers very well. The involvement of families is seen to be central to the promotion of pupils' best progress. There are home visits and many opportunities for workshops on a range of issues. There are very successful 'sibshops' arranged at the weekends. They provide enjoyable activities in a safe environment and space to appreciate their sibling's special needs away from any pressures at home.
- Very close links with other schools provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their personal, social and academic skills. Mainstream pupils take part in the school's activities and Blackmarston pupils learn alongside pupils in other schools.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is effective and has been strengthened by recent appointments. Governors are aware of the school's strengths and are very supportive. Recent training has helped them to appreciate ways of improving their work. There is an amended appraisal policy that addresses the links between performance and progression through the salary scales. The governing body is aware of pupils' progress but it has been slow to ensure that details of the impact of the pupil premium funding are given on the school's website. Governors have a good picture of teachers' practice and a very good handle on the budget. The school has good capacity to improve further.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117052
<b>Local authority</b>	Herefordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	427061

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	68
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	John Sklan and Rose Hunt
<b>Headteacher</b>	Siân Bailey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 February 2011
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