

The Pines Special School

Dreghorn Road, Birmingham, B36 8LL

Inspection dates 15–16 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The Pines is an outstandingly effective school, where pupils flourish.
- The headteacher, together with senior leaders and the governing body, have ensured teaching, pupils’ achievements and their behaviour and safety have remained first class, despite the future of the school being uncertain over the last few years.
- Pupils benefit from a memorable and interesting range of activities such as performing arts, opportunities to learn in mainstream schools and residential experiences.
- Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered exceptionally well and this contributes strongly to their personal development.
- The majority of pupils make outstanding progress, particularly in their literacy and communication skills.
- Despite cramped classrooms, teaching is outstanding. Organisation of groups and activities is excellent to minimise the limitations of the accommodation.
- Pupils’ behaviour and attitudes in lessons are outstanding. They enjoy school and participate in lessons and activities, such as the daily assembly, with enthusiasm.
- Parents rightly hold the school in high regard and comments such as ‘This is a fantastic school’ are not unusual sentiments.
- The leadership and management of the school are outstanding and have created a warm positive learning climate for pupils to thrive in.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 11 lessons, all of which were observed jointly with different members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- There were insufficient responses from parents to the online questionnaire Parent View to analyse them, but the school’s recent survey of parents’ views was considered.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation including the school’s information on pupils’ progress, its self-evaluation, development plans and information relating to the safeguarding of pupils, and 31 returns from the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Frank Price, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Rosemary Barnfield

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Pines Special School educates pupils who predominantly have autistic spectrum disorders and some also have additional language and communication difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding (additional funding allocated by the government for certain groups of pupils, in this case, those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and who are looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- The school has a higher than average number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, but most pupils are White British, Pakistani and Bangladeshi.
- Five pupils attend another mainstream school at The Firs School, which is situated on the same campus, for specific lessons and are supported by staff from The Pines.
- The school has an Outreach Advisory and Support Inclusion Service (OASIS) which currently supports 17 mainstream and special schools in maintaining placements for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.
- The headteacher took up the position of interim headship in September 2011 and in September 2013 this was made a permanent arrangement. The school was due to relocate and merge with another special school, but these plans have now been shelved. Plans for the school to relocate into more suitable accommodation and funding have been provisionally identified.
- The school has gained numerous awards including, Investors in People, Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark and the Schools Financial Value Standard.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the new planned accommodation meets the wide range of needs of pupils to further enhance teaching and learning.
- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching, for example by ensuring work set for more-able pupils stretches them further.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- The majority of pupils make outstanding progress. Their attainment is below average, but for a few pupils, by the time they leave school, their attainment has improved so that it is similar to that of mainstream pupils.
- All pupils achieve equally well, regardless of their background, special educational need or gender. The careful analysis of assessment information ensures that if individual pupils are not progressing as expected, additional help and support is quickly put in place.
- Literacy and communication skills are areas of particular strength. This is because these areas have a high priority across the school and are taught systematically. More-able pupils read with confidence and fluency and understand the text. Less-able pupils learn how to break down new words and work on understanding print in a range of situations.
- Evidence from pupils' work and in lessons, shows that pupils take pride in their work and concentrate well. For example in English, pupils' writing covers a wide range of purposes. Less-able pupils learn to write their name and more-able pupils write extended pieces of writing on visits they have been on or simple poetry.
- In numeracy, pupils often excel in using numbers, but find the application in real situations more difficult. To address this problem, the school ensures that numeracy is taught in very practical ways, so that their learning can be applied and made meaningful.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make equally outstanding progress. They do particularly well in the areas of communication, physical development and simple problem solving in numeracy. Children learn to take turns, explore and request activities. Some children exhibit obsessive behaviours which can prevent them from taking part in activities, but staff work well to reduce these traits so that children can interact more effectively with adults and peers.
- Pupils who receive additional funding through the pupil premium make up lost ground. This is because targeted help and support are made available such as additional staffing, music therapy or opportunities to learn in mainstream schools, which has resulted in pupils making increased progress in their communication and social development.
- Pupils' positive and enthusiastic attitudes to learning are evident in classes. They quickly focus on the task in hand and sustain concentration well. They cope remarkably well in cramped classrooms, even when some pupils can be noisy due to the nature of their disability.
- Teaching assistants are used superbly well to meet the wide range of learning needs of pupils. Numbers of pupils in classes are relatively large, but the way that all adults are organised to support pupils' learning is exceptional.
- Additional funding for physical education has enabled some pupils to do yoga and to become more fit and active and some have learned road-safety cycling skills, through the purchase of new bicycles.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching takes place in small cramped classrooms, but these limitations are usually overcome through superb organisation of adults and the environment. Teachers and other adults create a positive climate for learning in their lessons and pupils are interested and engaged.
- Teachers set high expectations for pupils and they respond well to this, by developing positive attitudes to learning and sustain concentration for more extended periods of time.
- When teaching is good the inadequate accommodation makes the managing of pupils' learning more difficult. For example, some children require quiet areas for them to concentrate better or to work in smaller groups.
- Lessons are very structured and pupils are used to well-rehearsed routines which help to reduce their anxieties and enable them to be more receptive to learning.
- Teaching over time is typically outstanding and as a result pupils make outstanding progress. Excellent use is made of practical activities and resources which capture the attention of pupils.
- Teachers and support staff are skilled in using symbols both to focus pupils' attention in lessons and to remind pupils how to behave. The management of pupils' behaviour is sensitively done, to minimise disruption to other pupils.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage mirrors the rest of the school. Children learn to take turns and interact with both adults and peers more effectively. Children's behaviour improves rapidly and they start to develop longer periods of concentration.
- Planning is very effective in making sure that the needs of pupils are met. Every class has a wide spectrum of pupils with a broad range of language development skills. These communication needs are met exceptionally well, so that pupils become more confident communicators.
- Occasionally more-able pupils are not given work to make them think hard enough, for example by working out more complicated lines of symmetry in a mathematics lesson.
- In an English lesson, pupils' communication skills were fostered by the use of a microphone which encouraged less-able pupils to make simple sounds and more-able pupils to express complex sentences.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding and the school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning, they are eager to please and enjoy lessons and other activities. More-able pupils, who are able to produce written work, do so with care and pride. Due to the nature of their disabilities, some pupils present challenging behaviour but make rapid improvements over time.
- The behaviour of pupils around the school is outstanding. Lunchtimes and playtimes are safe and pleasant social occasions. There are no exclusions and the attendance of pupils is average.

- The school promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils outstandingly well. Pupils have numerous opportunities to develop these areas through the celebration of other cultures, faiths and participating in residential visits. The performance of 'Macbeth' was a highlight for pupils at the school.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and supportive and this promotes an excellent harmonious ethos in the school where everyone is valued as an individual. Bullying is not evident. Parents are very positive about the school and see how pupils start to mature and improve in their personal development.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Leadership at all levels creates a positive, supportive and warm learning climate for pupils, which provides the context for pupils to achieve well academically and in their personal development.
- Despite the uncertainties over the future of the school for a number of years, highly effective leadership and management have not let their attention be deflected from ensuring that teaching and pupils' achievements have remained the most important thing that the school concentrates on.
- Subject leaders have developed their role very effectively, particularly over the last year. They have regular meetings to review pupils' progress and use assessment information well to check that targets set for pupils are stretching them. This contributes to the outstanding progress that pupils make.
- The school supports a number of schools in the local area to provide them with help and advice in order to equip other staff so that they are better placed to manage similar pupils in their own settings more effectively. The opportunities for pupils to take some of their lessons in other schools are managed and organised well and this helps to promote pupils' self-esteem effectively.
- The pupil premium and primary sport funding have been used for the benefit of pupils. It has helped pupils to make improved progress in their communication and social development and the expansion of physical education activities has promoted healthier and more active activities in school. For example, through some pupils being able to do Yoga.
- The management of staff performance is very thorough and has led to high quality practice across the school. Challenging but realistic targets to improve pupils' progress are set. The link between pay and the quality of teaching is well judged.
- The subjects and experiences that the school offers pupils are highly appropriate and balance academic rigour with personal, social and emotional development very well. Communication, behaviour management and literacy are important features of its work. The opportunities for pupils to participate in the performing arts, such as learning to play the ukulele and residential experiences, are excellent, and do much to promote pupils' self-confidence and enjoyment.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate and well founded and with highly effective leadership and management at all levels, the school has the capacity to improve further still. The school has the confidence of staff, parents and the local authority.
- The local authority has an accurate view of the school and supports the school when asked to do so.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body knows the strengths of the school and where improvements can be made. Governors have been involved in determining the future of the school and after several false starts now have an achievable vision for new accommodation on a different location, with plans and funding provisionally secured. Members of the governing body have specific subject and class responsibilities and regular visits are made to the school. They understand how additional funding for primary sports and for pupils eligible for the pupil premium has been used and what benefits have occurred as a result of this funding. There is a good link between pay and the quality of teaching. They have a good grasp of pupil assessment information which enables them to check that pupils' progress is as it should be, by comparing the results of their pupils with similar pupils nationally. Governors receive suitable training in areas such as safeguarding and financial matters.

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	103622
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	440335

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Cartwright
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Brandwood
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2010
Telephone number	0121 464 6136
Fax number	0121 464 3149
Email address	enquiry@pines.bham.sch.uk

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