

Merryfields School

Hoon Avenue, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, ST5 9NY

Inspection dates 26–27 March 2014

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

- Pupils achieve well at Merryfields School. Achievement in English, mathematics and personal development is good.
- More-able pupils make good progress in reading because of the effective approach to the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make).
- Most pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve well and quickly settle.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Pupils' learning is most effective when individually planned tasks fully meet their needs and abilities. Excellent questioning extends pupils' skills.
- Communication aids are used well to promote effective speaking between staff and pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, or those with autism spectrum disorders.
- Pupils behave well and benefit from consistent behaviour management by staff. Pupils feel safe at school.
- Parents are pleased with the care and support the school provides for them and their children.
- The strong curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. This is enriched through visits and residential experiences.
- The headteacher and other leaders have improved the achievement of pupils by setting challenging targets for teachers.
- Effective monitoring and training has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- The governing body manages the budget well and has an accurate view of the school's work. Governors make sure that pupils who receive additional funding fully benefit from it.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a very few lessons not all pupils make the best possible progress because their work is either too easy or too hard.
- Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage does not fully meet the wide variety of needs and abilities of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 12 lessons, some jointly with the headteacher. In addition, they made a few short visits to observe pupils learning and playing, and listened to some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, members of the governing body, and some pupils. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information about pupils' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information, the sports premium action plan and some pupils' books.
- The inspectors took account of the 14 responses to the online survey (Parent View) to provide a helpful picture of parents' views of the school. Inspectors also took account of 11 questionnaires from school staff.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Rosemary Barnfield

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school caters for primary-aged pupils with learning difficulties from across Staffordshire, particularly in the area around Newcastle-under-Lyme. Some pupils come from adjacent authorities.
- Almost all students have a statement of special educational needs for their moderate, severe, or profound and multiple learning difficulties. A growing number of pupils have autistic spectrum disorders and a few have additional visual, hearing or multi-sensory impairments.
- Six children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are undergoing assessment and as yet do not have a statement of educational needs. Pupils join the school at different times, not just in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- A minority of pupils have additional behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- Most students are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is very low, and no pupils speak English as an additional language. There are many more boys than girls.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional funding for certain groups, including students known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- The school also receives primary school sport funding for its pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable pupils to make even better progress in every lesson by:
 - ensuring that tasks are always fully matched to their individual needs and abilities
 - monitoring learning regularly to ensure that all pupils achieve the best that they possibly can.
- Improve the provision for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that they all make even better progress by ensuring that the accommodation and resources fully meet the needs and abilities of the children in each class.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- When they enter the school, pupils' attainment is usually well below average because of their moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, and/or sensory impairments. Most pupils begin to catch up once they start at the school because of the good quality of support they receive. As a result, they achieve well during their time at the school.
- The vast majority make good progress in English and mathematics and in their personal development. Pupils supported through the pupil premium benefit from extra support and tasks that fully meet their needs, enabling them make the same progress as their classmates in English and mathematics.
- More-able pupils make good progress in reading. They use phonics accurately to help them read new words. Other pupils regularly share books, look at pictures, follow stories and/or use symbols to make and read sentences. They regularly take their books home and share their reading with their parents.
- Pupils benefit from specific activities that help them to hold pens and pencils correctly. In Years 1 and 2, pupils made excellent progress in developing hand control as they practised tracing and painting with their fingers. They had fun while they learned new skills and some pupils used symbols and/or technology well to choose words or write sentences.
- Progress in mathematics is equally good. Pupils enjoy the practical aspects of mathematics. More-able pupils in Years 3 and 4 made good progress in sorting objects and creating tally charts from their results. They benefited from good support that helped them to understand what was expected.
- Pupils benefit from the primary school sport funding. This has, for example, enabled those with profound and multiple learning difficulties to have access to more physical activities in the community.
- Pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, often associated with their autism, improve their behaviour and their skills. They make at least the progress expected of them from their starting points during their time at the school.
- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve well overall, but occasionally their learning is limited by their poor accommodation and the lack of appropriate resources which do not meet the ages or abilities of young children.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils' good progress is a result of teaching that is almost always good and some that is outstanding, helping pupils to achieve well from their individual starting points.
- Teaching typically challenges pupils through highly effective questioning to join in and find answers for themselves. Effective use of technology supports pupils' very individual communication needs, enabling all groups to have a means of speaking, responding to questions and sharing ideas with their friends. As a result, pupils engage well in learning and enjoy lessons.

- Learning activities are well matched to the needs and abilities of individual pupils in almost all lessons. However, very occasionally information about what pupils know and can do is not used well enough in planning their work. As a result, some activities are too easy or too hard and occasionally not enough tasks are planned to keep pupils' interested. In these lessons, not all pupils achieve quite as well as they could.
- An example of very well planned tasks that led to excellent achievement was evident in Years 2 to 5 where pupils with autism were studying the story of 'The Tin Forest'. Pupils benefited from high quality resources and support that fully matched their individual needs and abilities, enabling them to make better than expected progress in their writing tasks.
- Communication aids to help support pupils who find speaking difficult are very well planned for by teachers and other staff. A variety of aids are prevalent in all classrooms, particularly the use of symbols. This makes sure that all groups of pupils have a means to express themselves.
- Effective teaching of phonics ensures that those pupils who are able to read make good progress. Pupils benefit from regular phonics teaching that enables their recognition of sounds and words. The pupils who read to inspectors used their phonic knowledge well to build new or unknown words.
- The checking of pupils' progress has improved since the last inspection. It is typically helpful; pupils understand the process and it helps them to know what they need to do to improve further. Tracking pupils' progress as they move through the school is now regularly undertaken and shows their good progress over time.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are polite and often help each other in and around the school. Their enjoyment of school is evident in their consistently good and improving attendance, and the lack of exclusions over the past two years.
- Behaviour in lessons is almost always good. Pupils help to tidy their classrooms, put away their own resources and work well with their classmates. On the very few occasions in lessons where tasks are not matched closely enough to individual pupils' abilities, behaviour dips because they become restless.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Individual behaviours are well monitored. Older pupils told the inspectors that they enjoy lessons, feel really safe and that there is good behaviour at the school. The most-able pupils know the importance of staying safe when using the internet and in the community.
- Pupils in Year 6 understand what bullying is and say there is none at the school. Observations of school records showed this to be true. Pupils' good behaviour is promoted well by the wide range of appropriate activities, the different trips and relevant tasks that the school provides.
- Pupils with very challenging behaviour, including those whose behaviour is linked to their autism, benefit from appropriate management and often one-to-one support so that any disruptions or behaviour incidents are minimal.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Through a wide range of additional activities, including regular swimming, assemblies, visits and residential

experiences, pupils have an accurate view of life outside their school.

- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Some Year 6 pupils told inspectors that they have already visited their new secondary school and are looking forward to moving there at the start of the next school year.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, ably supported by other leaders, staff and governors, has successfully built on the good outcomes from the previous inspection. The leadership team has been strengthened so that the school's capacity to drive improvement forward has increased.
- Leaders use the national standards for teaching effectively to improve teachers' skills. There are several examples of staff at all levels undertaking additional qualifications and training so that they can help pupils make even better progress. The governing body is fully involved in checking how well pupils are doing and leaders are aware of which teachers deserve promotion.
- Leaders have improved the way that they check teaching and pupils' progress to make sure pupils make the progress expected of them. This now enables them to increase the rate of learning of any pupil falling behind. Leaders are aware that learning in a few lessons needs improving.
- Information about pupils' progress over the past three years shows that the school is closing the gaps in achievement by successfully supporting those pupils who find learning difficult. As a result, the vast majority are on track to meet their targets.
- The school provides regular training for staff in aspects such as behaviour management and safeguarding, ensuring consistent practice across the school.
- The local authority provides effective support to the school, helping the school's leaders to improve provision and outcomes.
- Effective links with local schools have helped leaders to check the accuracy of their judgements about pupils' progress.
- The range of subjects and topics taught meet pupils' needs very well. For example, additional speech and physical therapies support the personal and language needs of any pupil who requires it, particularly those with profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Leaders promote good relationships with parents who are pleased with the school. All of those who responded to the online questionnaire said that their child enjoys school and that the school keeps them safe.
- Through what they provide, leaders successfully eliminate discrimination and promote good relationships which make sure that all pupils have equal access to the experiences on offer.
- Safeguarding procedures meet the government's current requirements.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body supports the school well, providing good quality challenge to leaders. Governors are regularly involved in checking how well the school is doing. They have received

training to help them understand information about pupils' progress and how it compares with other similar schools. Many governors are regular visitors. Through their visits and termly reports from the headteacher, members have an accurate view of what is working well and what needs improving, including a good awareness of the quality of teaching. Governors have undertaken an audit to ensure that they have the skills to benefit the school. Good management of resources means that finances are used well to benefit pupils' achievement, including the pupil premium and primary school sport funding. Governors are fully involved in managing the performance of staff through setting targets and they work to ensure that the best teachers are rewarded through promotion. Governors are rigorous about tackling underperformance.

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	124519
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	431140

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Savage
Headteacher	Sarah Poyner
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2011
Telephone number	01782 296076
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