

Fox Wood Special School

Chatfield Drive, Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire, WA3 6QW

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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.

- Pupils across the school, including those who start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, achieve well whatever their starting points.
- Staff are highly skilled at understanding pupils' often very complex needs. They ensure activities set enable pupils to make as much progress as possible both academically, and socially and emotionally.
- The sixth form is good. Students who attend make good progress and achieve well because of good teaching.
- The quality of teaching is nearly always good with examples of outstanding practice. As a result, pupils arrive at school eager to start another day's learning.
- Staff use well any information on individual pupils' previous learning to plan future learning and this maximises pupils' progress.
- Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school as evidenced by their happy smiles as they greet staff on their arrival. Despite their very high level of needs, their behaviour is excellent and learning is almost never disrupted by incidents of difficult behaviour.
- Pupils spoken to were very keen to tell inspectors how safe and secure they felt in school. Comments included, 'School is really, really good. It makes me happy because it's like home.'
- Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders, in partnership with governors, are focused on continually improving the school. They have through, for example, the introduction of a more accurate system for measuring pupils' progress, increased pupils' achievement levels since the previous inspection.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The most able pupils make less progress in mathematics than in English because work set is not always sufficiently challenging.
- Marking and feedback do not consistently give pupils sufficient guidance on how to identify the next steps needed to improve their work.
- Senior leaders do not always carry out checks on the quality of teaching sufficiently often. As a result, they are not always as aware as they should be of the quality of teaching in individual classrooms.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 15 lessons and parts of lessons taught by teachers and support staff. A lesson observation was undertaken jointly with the acting headteacher. The inspection team examined, with the acting headteacher, the quality of pupils' work from across the school.
- Inspectors held meetings and had discussions with pupils, the acting headteacher, the mathematics coordinator, the Chair of the Governing Body and the vice chair. They also met with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team took into account the views of parents collected by school leaders in a recent questionnaire, as too few parents responded to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) for views to be registered. Inspectors also took into account the views of parents who contacted them during the inspection.
- The inspection team studied health and safety documentation, including the school's risk assessments for moving and handling pupils, teachers' planning, documents relating to the procedures to check the performance of staff, pupils' attendance data and the school's system for checking pupils' progress.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christine Potter

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school provides education and care for disabled pupils and for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs, the vast majority of whom have a statement of special educational need.
- Many pupils who attend have complex needs. Approximately 40 per cent of pupils who attend have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) approximately a quarter profound and multiple learning difficulties and a further third have severe learning difficulties. Many also have a range of medical difficulties and all have communication difficulties.
- The vast majority of pupils who attend the school come from families of White British heritage, with a small number from minority ethnic groups.
- A larger than average proportion of pupils is eligible for support through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- The school has a range of awards and accreditations including the National Autistic Society Accreditation, Specialist School status for Communication and Interaction, Basic Skills Quality Mark, and Primary and Secondary Arts Award.
- The school is in the process of moving to a new location which they will share with students from another special school. Currently, sixth-form students already attend school at the new site.
- Since the last inspection, the school has been subject to an unusually high level of staff absence due to accident and illness. At the time of the inspection, the deputy headteacher had taken on the role of acting headteacher and the assistant headteacher was acting as her deputy. Four out of 13 permanent members of teaching staff were also absent.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the most able pupils' achievement in mathematics by ensuring work set is always sufficiently challenging to enable this group to make the faster progress of which they are capable.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by improving the consistency in the quality of marking and feedback so that it always gives pupils a clear understanding of what they need to do to make further progress.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by increasing the time senior leaders spend checking the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms across the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils who join the school arrive with a broad range of attainment and differing levels of need. Staff are good at assessing pupils' educational starting points and set individual targets which help pupils to progress at levels closely in line with their abilities. As a result, pupils make good or better progress over their time in school.
- All groups of pupils, including those with ASD, and severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties, achieve well because their needs are well supported.
- Students who attend the sixth form also make good progress in academic subjects such as English and mathematics and in subjects such as life skills and enterprise which prepare them well for life after school. This represents good achievement overall and is further evidence of students' good accomplishments. This success is reflected in the performance of last year's leavers, all of whom successfully transferred to a selection of college courses.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage also achieve well through the many interesting and exciting experiences and opportunities for learning offered in the school's early years unit. Skilled staff make learning fun and ensure children are given, no matter what their level of need or disability, access to a wide variety of experiences. This could clearly be seen when children were given the opportunity to feel, touch and smell shaving foam. Much enjoyment was clearly derived from the sensation of shaving foam on their faces as was evidenced by the giggles and squeals of pleasure.
- Progress for the most able pupils in mathematics is slightly slower than in English because work set in some classes is not always sufficiently challenging and, as a result, pupils' progress slows.
- 'I love listening to animal stories best', explained one pupil, while another older pupil explained he preferred reading books about 'the stars in the sky'. Not all pupils are able to read. However, the school's very clear focus on developing reading skills as often as possible by encouraging pupils to look at books has increased pupils' enjoyment of reading and love of books.
- The progress of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is equal to all other groups in English, communication and mathematics. This is due to the school's effective use of pupil premium funding. The school uses this to provide extra support in the classroom and to boost pupils' attainment and achievement through gaining extra and more varied experiences on trips away from the classroom.
- Pupils from other minority ethnic groups make equally good progress to their peers, clearly demonstrating the school's continuous commitment to ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity.

The quality of teaching is good

- School records and pupils' work support the views of school leaders and inspectors that the quality of teaching is good and pupils achieve well.
- 'I love coming to school and learning things because teachers make lessons fun', commented a pupil. Information about how well pupils are doing is used effectively to plan the majority of future learning. As a result, work set accurately meets the needs of most pupils, enabling them to make good progress overall.
- However, progress for the most able is not always as good as it could be. This is because work set does not always offer sufficient challenge to enable the best progress to be made by these pupils and feedback and marking do not always consistently give pupils guidance on how to improve their work.
- This effective matching of activities to pupils' needs could clearly be seen in a rebound trampoline session in which a higher level teaching assistant, trained in rebound techniques, worked closely with a group of pupils with different needs. The darkened room, coloured lights and music added much to the enjoyment and ambience of the session as pupils with even the

most profound levels of need were encouraged to move and stretch while being gently bounced. Pupils' high levels of enjoyment were easily recognised in their willingness to undertake the tasks and the subsequent laughter and amusement at each bounce.

- English and communication skills are taught effectively in a variety of different ways, matching the needs of pupils well.
- Staff work very closely as a team in each classroom. Teaching assistants are very clear about their roles in supporting learning and are highly effective at assessing pupils' progress. Their excellent skills have been particularly useful at supporting the larger than usual numbers of supply teachers who have worked in the school over the last two terms and have helped minimise disruption to pupils' learning and progress.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is slightly slower than in English and communication, particularly in the areas of number work, measuring and recognising shapes and solving problems. The recently appointed mathematics coordinator has recognised this shortfall and increased the time spent in mathematics lessons on these aspects. As a result, current data show that pupils are now making faster progress in mathematics. Training has been planned for the near future to improve further teachers' confidence and skills in teaching these elements of the mathematics curriculum and to accelerate pupils' achievement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. This is in spite of their often high levels of need. They show exceptionally caring attitudes to each other, staff and visitors. 'Everyone is my friend', commented one pupil, emphasising the happy and caring atmosphere within the school.
- Reminders of how to behave are displayed on each classroom wall and any difficult behaviour is exceptionally well managed by staff so learning is almost never interrupted.
- Pupils are very keen and eager to learn. The vast majority clearly enjoy coming to school as evidenced by their happy smiles towards staff as they greet them on arrival.
- Parents who completed a recent school survey feel behaviour is very good and their comments such as: 'The atmosphere is always calm and welcoming' and 'I couldn't be happier with all the staff that look after my child', reflect this view well.
- School records show that no pupils have been permanently excluded over the last three years. Incidents of difficult behaviour are very few because of the effective way in which the behaviour policy is applied consistently across the school.
- Attendance is currently above the national average for similar schools and has continued to rise for the last three years. This is due to the very strong relationships forged with parents and also senior leaders' continuous focus on improvement.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils say they feel very safe and secure at school because staff 'always listen to me'.
- Pupils spoken to were clear about the different forms bullying can take. They feel incidents do not happen inside school and they are clear about where to turn should a confrontation occur inside or outside school.

The leadership and management are good

- The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of further improvement. They have, in partnership with another local special school, successfully opened a new combined sixth form which is now offering students a wider curriculum. Their clear and focused vision for improvement is shared by staff and governors and has brought about recent improvement in pupils' achievement, particularly in English and communication.
- Leaders, including the governing body, have a clear plan for future improvement. Senior leaders have accurately identified those areas of the school's work which are in need of improvement

and have set effective targets to reach their goals.

- Despite what has clearly been a turbulent year for the school, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement have continued to be good as evidenced by observation of pupils' work, reviews of teaching and achievement over time, and the school's data.
- While senior leaders are accurate in their checking of teaching, they have not always carried out sufficient observations of staff, particularly those new to the school, to give them an accurate view of the performance of all teachers. As a result, progress has slowed occasionally for pupils in a small number of classes.
- The role middle leaders play in supporting senior leaders is more clearly defined. They are making a valuable contribution through, for example, regularly checking the quality of teaching in their subject, to further accelerate the achievement of pupils particularly in mathematics.
- The headteacher ensures performance targets for staff link directly to pupils' achievement and targets within the school's improvement plan. Checks on the performance of staff are undertaken regularly and this information is now being used to make decisions on teachers' pay.
- The school's curriculum is well organised and a themed approach ensures subjects are clearly linked. Enrichment activities such as trips away from school enhance learning by offering pupils opportunities and experiences away from the classroom.
- Art and enterprise activities coupled with lessons in religious education, personal and social education promote pupils' good levels of spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- The school has used its allocation of sports funding monies effectively to increase pupils' access to a diverse variety of different sports and improve their skills in a range of different activities which includes, for example rebound trampolining therapy. Training offered to staff has improved their skills and confidence in teaching physical education and this has contributed to pupils' healthy lifestyles.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The Chair of the Governing Body and the vice chair have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of improvement. They have worked hard to support the leadership team during the school's recent staffing difficulties. Governors bring a range of skills and experience to the governing body, which they update through regular training. They have developed a clear understanding of pupils' achievement through their interpretation and understanding of the school's data and offer senior leaders good levels of support and challenge in their quest to bring about further improvement.
 - Governors have also developed an effective system for checking the performance of all staff which rewards good teaching and addresses underperformance. They manage pupil premium funding prudently and this careful management has enabled them to support eligible pupils well. Safeguarding procedures and policies meet current requirements.

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	111496
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	439647

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	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judith Elshaw
Headteacher	Karen Nicholls
Date of previous school inspection	12 July 2011
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