

Old Hall School

Bentley Lane, Walsall, WS2 7LU

Inspection dates 1–2 July 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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The quality of teaching is good. As a result, pupils achieve well, making good and often rapid progress in their reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have activities that are very closely matched to their diverse needs; consequently, they achieve exceptionally well.
- Teachers have a detailed knowledge of all aspects of their pupils' development and they expect a great deal of them.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and their attendance is good. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school. Almost all incidents of misbehaviour are closely linked to pupils' assessed needs, notably autism.
- Pupils' enthusiasm for learning is stimulated by the wide range of subjects and activities they have and excellent use of communication aids.
- There are strong links with the local authority and partnership schools which provide rigorous checks and support for the school's work.
- The staff provide high-quality care for the pupils and this is one of the reasons pupils feel safe and free from bullying.
- The headteacher has quickly established herself as a strong and assertive leader. She has drawn together an effective team that is providing good leadership. Monitoring of teaching is robust and clearly helping to raise standards.
- Under the guidance of a new Chair of the Governing Body, governors have become better informed about the work of the school. This has helped maintain the school's effectiveness since the previous inspection.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Progress in writing and mathematics is not consistent across all classes.
- Very occasionally, worked is not planned sufficiently precisely in Years 1 to 6 so that it challenges all pupils sufficiently to achieve as well as they should.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 10 lessons and parts of lessons, most of which were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, teachers, subject and senior leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the school’s recent survey of parents’ and carers’ view of the school. There were too few entries on Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View, to be considered. The inspection team also took account of 28 completed staff questionnaires.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work and looked at a range of documentation including self-evaluation and plans for future development. Inspectors checked the school records of pupils’ progress and achievement. They also looked at the checks made on the quality of teaching. Behaviour logs and attendance records were analysed and all aspects of procedures relating to the safeguarding of children were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Paul Edwards, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jean Whalley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Old Hall is a smaller than average size primary school. It provides education for pupils with complex needs, mainly those with profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with a diagnosis of autism. A few have life limiting or deteriorating conditions. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages is well above average as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- A well above average percentage of pupils are supported through additional funding (known as the pupil premium) because they are looked after or are eligible for free school meals.
- The headteacher took up her position in April 2014, following several years as deputy headteacher of the school. Interviews for a replacement deputy are to be held before the end of the summer term.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that progress in English and mathematics is more even across some year groups by helping teachers:
 - plan work that is closely matched to pupils' prior learning and understanding in Years 1 to 6
 - give pupils in Years 1 to 6 work that is not too easy or too difficult.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' achievement is good. Some individual pupils achieve outstandingly well given their starting points. Because of their complex needs and profound disabilities, the standards reached by the pupils when they leave the school in Year 6 remain low.
- When children enter school in the Nursery or later on, their starting points are always very low. Children make rapid progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage because of the high quality of teaching and support. Staff rightly place a high priority on developing the children's communication skills. The school's records show the mammoth journey some have made in now being able to gesture and point and in responding to a stimulus.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a stronger focus on improving pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills. This has been effective. Pupils develop a love of books as seen when a group of eight to eleven year olds responded with great enthusiasm to the story, 'Commotion in the Ocean' with 'signing' the creatures they recognised in the illustrations.
- Older, more-able pupils are excited when they recognise familiar characters in books. These more-able pupils are counting confidently and beginning to develop an understanding of simple mathematical ideas. They get better at sorting objects and putting them in order according to their size or colour. They are well prepared for when they move on to the next school.
- Pupils from minority ethnic heritages make the same rate of progress as other pupils. Those who speak English as a second language also make similar progress. Their progress is helped through the use of simple sign language used in all classes.
- Those pupils supported by additional funding make progress that is at least in line with that of their classmates. The funding is well used to provide additional support, for example speech therapy, enabling these pupils to improve their progress. This demonstrates the school's commitment to ensure all pupils are treated equally.
- Very occasionally, pupils' progress in writing and mathematics is slower than it should be in some classes because work is either too challenging or does not stretch them enough.
- Pupils' physical skills improve very well. The sports funding has enabled the school to employ a specialist coach. The coach works alongside teachers, therapists and teaching assistants to improve pupils' coordination and physical skills. Pupils enjoy music and singing. Both are used as a very effective method improving communication with and between pupils.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time is consistently good. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils respond very well to the challenges set by their teachers; for example a pupil worked exceptionally hard to move his body to reach a target as part of his physical therapy. It was wonderful to see his delight when he achieved his goal.
- Teachers have an excellent understanding of how pupils with autism learn. They show great skills in ensuring the classroom environment is well suited to the pupils' needs. For example, they ensure that seating arrangements are such so pupils are not disturbed by the behaviour of others. Teachers are exceptionally good at recognising patterns of behaviour and adapt teaching and support to cater for unusual problems or occurrences.
- The pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties benefit from high-quality teaching and support. Teachers demonstrate a very clear understanding of the small steps that the pupils need to make to extend their learning. Most teachers are good at recognising the point at which pupils need to move to a fresh challenge.
- Teachers are usually very good at providing work for children appropriate for their age and ability. Planning is detailed and based on a clear analysis of previous work, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, not all teachers plan this consistently. As a result, work is very occasionally too difficult or too easy and results in some unevenness in pupils'

achievement in Years 1 to 6. Teachers mark the work of those pupils who are able to record their work regularly and systematically. The marking demonstrates the teachers' clear understanding of how well pupils achieve.

- Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy skills beyond the formal English and mathematics activities. Staff talk with pupils continually, doing their best to encourage them to say simple key words.
- Teaching assistants are very skilled at knowing when to step in and help pupils or when to give them the opportunity to try to work things out their own way. Equally, they know how to encourage them just to have a go. Speech therapists and those who help pupils with their movement and physical skills also contribute significantly to the pupils' development.
- Staff provide a warm and welcoming atmosphere into which pupils are welcomed each morning. The excellent relationships pupils have with adults encourage pupils to come to school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Visitors are quickly impressed by the calm atmosphere present throughout the school. Parents and carers responding to the school's questionnaire confirm the inspectors' view that the behaviour seen during the inspection is typical. Pupils say they are happy and look after one another and they say they make many friends.
- School records and behaviour logs also confirm pupils' outstanding behaviour over time. Questionnaires completed by the staff show they too believe that the excellent behaviour is a key strength of the school.
- The incidents of misbehaviour, almost always linked to pupils' autism, are managed exceptionally well, so that other pupils learn to ignore what is taking place. These incidents cause minimal disruption to learning because all staff know exactly what to do when the events take place.
- Pupils attend school regularly as often as they can. A small minority have considerable absences due to lengthy stays in hospital. However, as soon as they are able, these pupils are keen to get back to school. There have been no exclusions in recent years.
- Pupils do not feel there is any bullying and they say that other children are 'their friends'. Pupils cannot recall, and there is no record of, any name calling or any other form of bullying.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Safeguarding procedures and child protection procedures are rigorous. The risks that pupils' learning difficulties pose when taking part in activities are considered carefully. However, pupils enjoy a rich variety of activities such as donkey riding, swimming and sailing to which they look forward.
- Pupils have healthy meals and snacks. They have advice on health-related matters appropriate to their age and understanding. Exceptionally close attention is paid to ensuring the social and medical needs of pupils. Qualified nursing and highly trained staff oversee feeding programmes and the administration of pupils' medicines and the provision of emergency treatment.
- Many pupils require hoists to lift them in and out of wheelchairs; some require regular physiotherapy. Staff are very well trained to undertake these tasks safely.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders have worked hard and effectively to address issues identified during the previous inspection. There has been a stronger emphasis on developing pupils' skills in focused English and mathematics sessions. The effectiveness of this is seen in the pupils' continued improvement in these subjects.
- Since her appointment, the headteacher has re-emphasised the senior leaders' ambition to make this school the best it can be. All staff share this ambition and have high expectations of their pupils and of each other. Throughout the school, all pupils have the opportunity to take part in all activities; physical education activities are adapted so that those with extremely limited mobility can take part.

- The headteacher checks upon the quality of teaching and learning rigorously across the school and has an accurate picture of where the strengths and weaknesses lie. Teachers have clear advice regarding their performance and how they might improve. Until the appointment of a new deputy headteacher, the checks on teaching lie mainly with the headteacher.
- Teachers have good opportunities to improve their skills through continued training. The headteacher recognises the importance of 'not standing still' so guidance from external experts is sought and welcomed. New staff attend courses covering such areas as 'signing', ensuring all can communicate effectively with their pupils.
- Subject leaders have a very good grasp of their subjects and provide good guidance to their colleagues how they might adapt the curriculum to ensure it matches what their pupils need. The recent adoption of a 'creative curriculum' has resulted in subjects such as science being taught through a topic approach. Subject leaders provide good guidance to ensure all subjects are covered in sufficient depth.
- Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school and almost unanimous in their praise for how it is helping their children. They value the 'focus' days when they can come to school and be part of their children's learning. Those pupils who are able to express a view are equally complimentary and staff are proud to work at the school.
- The school provides well for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Of particular note is the way the school celebrates the major festivals of the many different ethnicities represented in the school. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed the visit by the Bangra dancer. The school's excellent facilities, including multi-sensory rooms and the hydrotherapy pool, help to promote spiritual and social skills.
- The additional funding has been used effectively to make sure all pupils can take a full part in all of the activities the school offers. It provides specialist equipment and resources to ensure these pupils progress as well as their peers.
- The local authority has provided termly visits for this good school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved considerably since the previous inspection. A review of governance by the local authority and the appointment of a new Chair of the Governing Body have helped to improve its effectiveness. A number of new governors have been appointed and they have been or are in the process of receiving training to enable them to carry out their duties effectively. Governors clearly hold school leaders to account for maintaining the effectiveness of the school over time.
 - The governing body carries out its statutory duties effectively. It has a good overview of safeguarding procedures and is robust in ensuring everyone in the school is safe and secure.
 - Recent training has provided governors with greater clarity as to how pupils achieve compared to those in similar schools nationally. They have a good understanding of how additional funding is used and its impact on pupils' achievement.
 - The governing body recognises the importance of teachers' progression on the pay scale being linked to pupils' progress.

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	104271
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	431158

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kristie Lowe
Headteacher	Lynn Hill
Date of previous school inspection	30–31 March 2011
Telephone number	01902 368045
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