

Peterhouse School

Preston New Road, Churchtown, Southport, PR9 8PA

Inspection dates 15–16 July 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.

- It very carefully identifies students' primary needs and then makes sure that they make excellent progress in addressing them. As a result, students often make outstanding progress in becoming more independent. They are more able to communicate and make sensible choices about those things that have an impact on their lives.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers are highly skilled in making sure that classrooms are organised in a way that best suits the learning needs of students. They skilfully manage large staff teams. Staff are particularly good at identifying the ways in which students can best be helped to communicate and develop their skills and talents.
- Students respond well to outstanding teaching. In most lessons, they concentrate hard for as long as they are able and show great pleasure when they succeed in their tasks. They often show great respect for their teachers and huge pride in their achievements.
- Behaviour is exceptionally well managed by the staff. Continuous adjustments are made in lessons to help all students to do as well as possible. There have been no exclusions in recent years. There is no bullying, racism or harassment on record and no use of restraint.
- Students are kept very safe in all situations. They are constantly being helped to understand how to keep themselves safe in the world outside school, especially when using computers or other technology.
- There is a relentless drive to keep making students' lives better. Leaders, managers and governors have built with great success on Ofsted's recognition of the school's excellence for over 10 years. They know that the key to continuing success is their relentless drive to improve teaching and learning so students can achieve exceptionally well. They recognise that the job will never be finished and that little things in some lessons can still be improved.
- The sixth form is outstanding. This is particularly so in the way it prepares students to transfer from school into other settings as they make the transition into adult life.

Information about this inspection

- Parts of 13 lessons were observed. Twelve different teachers were seen. There were no joint observations.
- Informal conversations were held with staff. There were longer discussions with senior managers.
- A meeting was held with the Chair of the Education Committee.
- There were eight responses to Parent View. Inspectors looked at the 23 responses that parents made to a questionnaire used in the recent Autism Accreditation review conducted by the National Autistic Society. They talked to three visiting parents.
- Further education provision on a separate site was visited for one morning of the inspection.
- Inspectors took account of the 28 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alastair Younger, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Maureen Coleman

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a special school for students with extreme degrees of autism and Asperger's syndrome. This means that many can display extremely challenging behaviour, severe communication difficulties and, frequently, complex other difficulties and disabilities.
- The school is administered by the registered charity, Autism Initiatives. The Education Authority of the administering charity is the appropriate authority for this school. (The Education Authority is perfectly happy to be referred to as the governing body for the purpose of reporting.)
- The school operates on two sites. Many of the sixth-form students, known as further education in school documentation, attend a separate building known to them as 'college' some two miles away from the main school. Some students board either part or full time, in two houses both about three miles distant. These are inspected separately from the school. Their reports are available on the Ofsted website.
- Students are currently placed by 15 local authorities from across the northwest of England.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs. There are currently 45 boys and six girls. The majority of students are White British. There are 15 students who are looked after children. About a quarter of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. In all, about a third are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides extra funding for looked after children and students known to be eligible for free school meals. This is above the national average for all schools.
- A new headteacher was appointed in 2011. Other changes since the last inspection include the senior leadership team being expanded to include two deputy headteachers and the appointment of four new teachers.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Maximise learning time by making sure that lessons keep to the expected times and do not start too late or finish too early.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Staff fastidiously address, assess and review the primary needs of students. Parents and students are fully involved in identifying the things that are most likely to change their lives for the better. They nearly always include references to becoming more independent, learning how to make themselves better understood and to make sensible choices about their lives. Each student has a hugely detailed 'Individual Plan for Prime Need'. This is reviewed on a weekly basis in individual tutorials. Records show precisely what progress is being made, and this is frequently outstanding and life changing.
- Attainment on entry is nearly always very low. It can often be similar to that more typical of children in infancy. A few students move on only very slowly from this point while the most able are admitted at a more advanced level; these students make excellent progress and frequently go on to gain awards and qualifications representing attainment in the early stages of the National Curriculum. Very occasionally, individuals demonstrate exceptional talents. Expressive arts are a strength of the school. There are many superb pieces of art on display around the school. Each year, there is a public exhibition of students' artwork in the town centre. In recent years, a few students have gained GCSE passes in art.
- In place of reading as conventionally taught, many students learn how to interpret signs, symbols and pictures that are significant to them. This enables them, for instance, to 'read' their timetable for the day so that they can find out what they are doing next, or to understand where the toilet is or where danger may lurk. A few students cherish books and can read fluently but frequently do not understand the meaning of what they have just read.
- In mathematics, most students make good progress, especially in learning how to count, and recognise shapes and sequences. Typically of many individuals with autism, they find it much harder to understand time.
- There is no difference in the achievement of any group of pupils. Progress is always monitored on an individual basis and, from their widely differing starting points, nearly all make outstanding progress. This is because of the tireless way that staff work to include all students in all activities, thus promoting equality of opportunity outstandingly well.
- The pupil premium funding is used exceptionally well to support a huge range of activities and opportunities that enrich students' lives and give them a wealth of real-life experiences that otherwise might not be available to them.
- Students in the sixth form (further education) continue to develop their literacy and numeracy skills and take giant strides in preparing for life after school. For example, they take part in enterprise activities and have short periods of work experience. They learn how to travel more independently and what they can do to support themselves and the community. Nearly all build on the awards and qualifications they gained at the end of Year 11.
- All students leave to positive destinations, such as college or training. Virtually all of them are still holding down these placements three years after the school started monitoring them.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- There is 'strength in depth' in the teaching. This is why students achieve outstandingly well.
- Great attention is paid by teachers to the environment they create in order to support students' needs to best effect. Classrooms are not overloaded with distractions that students would find difficult to cope with, but neither are they too clinical or soulless.
- Because most students need so much support, there are often more staff in classrooms than there are students. These large staff teams are very effectively managed to make sure that all students are given the support they need to learn and behave, while not detracting from the school's constant efforts to promote as much independence as possible.
- Staff are highly skilled in using a wide range of methods to help students to communicate. These

include the widespread use of pictures, signs and symbols as well as objects of reference and signing. Staff are good at using simple, short statements such as 'Good sitting' or 'Good listening' to support students' attention skills. Some students are helped to express their needs through a picture-exchange system. Many have visual timetables to help them to understand where they are in the day and what comes next. The reason that these systems are so effective is that much work has been done to promote consistency in the way different staff use them.

- A few students are identified as learning at a sensory level or through experiencing different stimuli. When this is the case, teachers make excellent use of special facilities such as the light room, which has various special effects to create different moods and sensations.
- The pace of lessons is usually very well suited to the differing needs of students, but sometimes activities extend over too short a period. A very few lessons tend to start some time after they are meant to and a few finish a while before they should. Leaders and inspectors have noticed this issue during their checks on teaching, noting the need to 'reduce down-time'.
- It is made very clear to students exactly what they are going to do and to learn in every lesson. When teachers check what students have learned, they always return to these earlier statements to help students see whether they have achieved their targets or not.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding.
- The nature of their special educational needs means that many students have very little self-control over their actions and often behave impulsively. Staff compensate for this by making sure that they recognise what may trigger these reactions and signs that betray the onset of extreme behaviour. As a result, all students are supported highly effectively to help them to behave as well as possible. Many records show the significant progress individuals make in taking more responsibility for their actions, for instance, by taking themselves away from things that are troubling them before they reach crisis point.
- It is a measure of the school's success in improving students' behaviour that there is no evidence of force or restraint being used. The school never has to resort to exclusion. There is no evidence of bullying, harassment, sexism or racism. Property is respected and students rarely deface or damage their own work.
- Every effort is made to include all students in all activities, including school trips. This gives many of them special opportunities to mix with the public and to develop essential social skills. When the pupil premium funding is used to support some of this work, the impact is abundantly evident in the sheer joy that can be seen on students' faces in photographs of visits to the zoo or the beach.
- Every incident is systematically recorded. Sometimes incidents trigger new targets in students' primary needs plans so that they can be discussed with students in their tutorials. Strategies are developed to prevent incidents happening again.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students are given a huge amount of advice about how to keep themselves safe. As the greatest threat to a student's safety sometimes comes from himself or herself, staff are highly skilled in reducing unsafe or self-harming behaviours. They are very effective at preventing any mental health issues arising.
- A lot of attention is paid to making students aware of 'bad things' that could happen to them if they do not use computers and other forms of technology sensibly. Great care is taken to assess potential risk in any situation that students may find themselves in. They are given extensive advice about how to keep themselves healthy and to avoid unhealthy habits.
- Students attend whenever they can. Absence is nearly always related to personal circumstances, often connected to health or issues out of school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Staff are universally proud to work in this school. Many express gratitude to leaders and

managers for the way that they have been helped to excel at their jobs and how this has allowed them to become ever more effective at helping the students in their care.

- The headteacher and two deputies form a highly effective management team. They have clearly identified roles, well matched to their strengths. Middle managers are also highly effective, such as in the way they organise and manage transition arrangements throughout the school, and especially in the way students are prepared for leaving. In this small school, the teachers act very successfully as middle leaders. They manage their support assistants with great skill. The school office and reception is exceptionally well managed to provide a warm welcome to parents and visitors.
- Leaders and managers have the clarity of vision to spot even little things that can be improved. The leadership and management of teaching and learning are exceptional. One example is the way that changes in staffing, with the replacement of some very experienced staff by some much less experienced teachers, have not resulted in any deterioration in the quality of teaching.
- Regular meetings between teachers and leaders allow them to discuss what they think could be improved. They identify what they want students to be able to do, pinpoint the skills students need to reach these targets and consider what they can contribute for students to achieve their goals.
- This system ensures a high degree of consistency in practice, which is of huge importance in maintaining high-quality teaching and learning. Recent areas of focus have included promoting students' independence, managing classroom teams and supporting behaviour.
- Consistency in teaching is also promoted most effectively through the use of case studies of different students. Teachers are asked to identify how individuals react in different situations and why. They then think about how well different approaches are working in improving students' learning and well-being. This approach is typical of the innovative ways in which leaders and managers are driving teaching and learning to new heights.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance was a weaker feature at the time of the last inspection. Since then, there have been significant changes and all identified weaknesses have been fully addressed. The governing body now has a very firm grasp of the school's strengths and areas for development. It remains highly supportive but is now more challenging in its approach. Governors ask pertinent questions about what leaders are doing and to what effect.
 - The governing body keeps a close check on students' achievements and the quality of teaching. Governors hold the headteacher to account and make sure that any staff promotions or movements through pay scales are fully merited.
 - Parents are very well represented on the governing body. They contribute well in making sure that the governing body checks that all safeguarding requirements are met, equal opportunities are promoted and that all students are fully included.
 - Governors keep a close check on the finances, especially on how extra income, for instance from the pupil premium, is being used and to what effect.

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	133748
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	439614

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	51
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Birtwell
Headteacher	Janet Allan
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2009
Telephone number	01704 506682
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