

Mary Elliot Special School

Leamore Lane, Walsall, WS2 7NR

Inspection dates 8–9 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- From their starting points, students achieve well throughout the school. Teachers and teaching assistants know the students well and support them effectively.
- There is a strong focus on English and mathematics, with a good focus on improving students' communication skills.
- Teaching is good and often outstanding. Teachers plan activities that are interesting and stimulate the students' enthusiasm for learning.
- Excellent links with feeder primary special schools help students to settle very quickly when they start school.
- The sixth form is good. It provides a good range of accredited courses that improve students' confidence and achievement and prepares them well for life beyond school.
- There are well-organised opportunities for older students to undertake work experience.
- Behaviour is good. There is a calm atmosphere in classrooms and students settle to their work quickly and with little fuss. Movement in and around the school is well managed.
- Students enjoy school and this is seen in the good attendance of most.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Record keeping is exemplary and cooperation between professionals and different agencies is outstanding. Consequently, concerns are dealt with promptly and efficiently.
- The headteacher is ambitious for the school and, together with other senior leaders, is ensuring it continues to improve. Improved tracking of students' progress is helping to raise students' achievement and the quality of teaching.
- The governing body provides effective support and challenge. It holds senior leaders to account for how well students are achieving.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- On some occasions, students are given work that is too challenging or not matched sufficiently closely to their abilities. Consequently, they lose concentration and their progress slows.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 12 lessons, most of them jointly with senior leaders. In addition an inspector listened to some students reading.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and the Chair and two other members of the Governing Body. Telephone conversations were held with a representative of the local authority and the deputy headteacher who was attending a course.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at several documents. These included the school's own information about students' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and the work undertaken by students.
- There were too few responses to the Ofsted online survey (Parent View) for the inspectors to take into account. The inspectors took account of responses to the school's own parent survey and the 42 questionnaires completed by school staff.

Inspection team

Paul Edwards, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Cliff Mainey

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mary Elliot provides secondary education for students with a wide range of needs.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. The statements are for severe learning difficulties, profound multiple learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders.
- At 54%, the proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (additional funding), is almost double the national average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups, 33%, is above average. They are mainly from Black African, Indian, Pakistani or Other White British heritage.
- Sixth form students are provided with work experience through Walsall College, 'Links to Work' and Rodbaston Agricultural College.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher joined the school just over a year ago.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and progress by:
 - ensuring teachers make the best use of information about how well students are achieving when planning lessons
 - ensuring work is pitched at the correct level and is not too difficult for all students.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Since their appointment senior leaders have been tenacious in their efforts to improve all aspects of the school. The introduction of more detailed tracking of students' progress has enabled them to clearly identify which students are achieving well and those who should do better. More precise target setting is leading to improved achievement of all groups of students, particularly in the key areas of English, mathematics and science.
- Senior leaders and heads of departments consistently communicate the importance of high quality of teaching. Good support and professional development are provided to enable all staff to improve their skills. Teaching assistants have been provided with clear guidance on how they can contribute to assessing students' work. This has provided the school with a more in-depth analysis of how well students are achieving.
- Very clear procedures are in place so all staff and students fully understand what is expected of students and how they should behave. Leaders ensure that all staff have regular training in managing behaviour and safeguarding arrangements.
- Additional funding is used effectively to improve the achievement of eligible students. A detailed analysis of students' disabilities and needs is undertaken so that resources can be accurately targeted to ensure these students progress as well as others. Senior leaders are successful in ensuring all students, no matter what their background or disability, have every opportunity to achieve equally well.
- Heads of departments and subject leaders carry out their duties effectively. Senior leaders rightly recognise the need to give them more responsibility to enable them to make a greater contribution to school improvement.
- Senior leaders have considered the new National Curriculum and adapted it effectively so that it meets the needs of its students. Students obtain entry-level and functional skills in a range of subjects. Staff focus on teaching social and communication skills so that students are able to become more independent.
- The curriculum prepares students well for their life in modern Britain through regular theme days which build on the students' different ethnic backgrounds. Music and art play a significant part in developing students' cultural awareness. The students' artwork adorning the corridors is testament to this aspect of their work. There is no discrimination and all students are enabled to take part in the additional curriculum activities such as sailing and horse riding.
- Regular meetings are held with parents, students and specialist staff to determine what students will do when they leave school. Students visit the school's own 'bedsit', a short distance from the school, to develop important life skills. A variety of workplace visits and placements are arranged, for those students who are able, to prepare for life in paid employment. The school has close links with all providers of alternative provision enabling it to closely monitor the students' attendance, behaviour and achievement.
- The school arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements. All staff are fully trained, know who to contact, and do not hesitate to do so, should they have a concern about a student's welfare.
- The local authority provides a moderate level of support for this good school. It provides challenge and support for senior leaders who value the guidance provided. The school has links with neighbouring schools and those in adjacent authorities, enabling it to compare, evaluate and moderate students' achievements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body supports the school well. Governors have good professional experience and share leaders' ambition for the future of the school. Leaders ensure governors are kept up to speed with the changes in the way teachers now assess and record the students' progress. Consequently, governors have a clear understanding of students' achievement and how well the school is performing compared to similar schools.
 - Senior leaders share detailed information about the quality of teachers' performance with the pay committee and progression along the pay scale has to be ratified by the governing body. Governors are confident that underperformance is dealt with effectively by senior leaders.
 - Governors have detailed financial knowledge and plan well for the future. They are aware small fluctuations in student numbers can have a significant impact on staffing and thus ensure they have contingency plans. They are fully involved in the school's development and consider expenditure carefully.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students behave well both in lessons and during breaktimes. School documentation shows that incidents of poor behaviour are rare. Students' good behaviour in and around the school is encouraged by the positive relationships that exist between staff and students. Students learn how to take turns, listen to others and to celebrate the achievements of their classmates.
- The school's good strategies to manage behaviour ensure that all students, including those on the autistic spectrum, understand the school's rules and improve their behaviour over time. Very occasionally, where work is too difficult for them, students lose concentration. Students who attend alternative provision behave well. Teaching assistants who accompany them on placements ensure a consistent approach in the management of behaviour.
- It is clear from students' responses to lessons that they enjoy school very much. Parents confirm this to be the case. Attendance continues to improve and is similar to that seen for different groups of students nationally. A very small number of students are absent for extended periods but this is usually for medical reasons.
- Students enjoy taking on responsibilities such as being members of the school council. Their current task is to ensure other students understand the importance of using the internet safely. The school prepares students well for life in today's British society, for example through teaching how voting operates in a democratic organisation.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- The school has rigorous procedures to check those who visit the school. Security procedures ensure students are kept very safe in classrooms and outside areas. Risk assessments are undertaken for visits and ensure nothing is left to chance.
- Students say there is no bullying in school and school records show that incidents of bullying and racism are extremely rare. Students are very confident that staff will address any of their concerns.
- The welfare and safety of students has a high profile. Child protection procedures are extremely rigorous and keenly adhered to. All staff and governors are fully aware of the procedures and who to contact should they have a concern.
- The school ensures students attending alternative provision are kept safe and secure. Teaching assistants accompany students where necessary and regular discussions with providing institutions help to ensure students' medical and other needs are met.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers usually have high expectations of what students can achieve. They are knowledgeable and know their students well. They engage students with their enthusiasm and students respond well. Most students work hard and are keen to complete tasks.
- There is a strong focus on the teaching of literacy, reading and mathematics. All students are provided with opportunities to improve their communication skills. All teachers and support staff make effective use of signing to aid communication. More able students are challenged well to improve their counting and basic addition and subtraction skills through the effective use of resources. Computers, interactive whiteboards and tablet computers are used well to stimulate students' desire to learn.
- Teachers and support staff work together well. Teaching assistants have improved their understanding of how students progress and they make a significant contribution to assessing and tracking how well students achieve. The compilation of 'learning journals' provides a comprehensive record of students' achievements and is a valuable aid to teachers in analysing how quickly students are progressing.
- Teachers question students well. They are persistent but patient, allowing those who struggle to communicate to become involved in the lesson.
- Staff are well trained in areas such as autism and have a very good understanding of how students with profound and multiple and severe learning difficulties progress. They recognise the apparently small steps that students make but which are significant milestones.
- Occasionally, teachers do not make the best use of the data recording students' progress and give students work that is too challenging for some. Consequently, students lose interest and concentration and do not progress as quickly as they should.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' starting points on entry to the school are low. Evidence from their work, the school's own data and observation during lessons show that most are making good progress throughout the school including the sixth form.
- Students with autism and severe learning difficulties make good progress in communication, literacy and numeracy and in their personal, social and health education. Those with profound and multiple learning difficulties also make good progress. They are supported well, helping them to make small steps in communication and cognitive learning.
- Students' reading skills develop well. They are encouraged to read with a good emphasis on the use of phonics (sounds that letters make) for those for whom it is appropriate.
- The most able students often make very good progress in writing and mathematics; activities are well matched to their abilities so that they achieve really well. They are beginning to understand the value of money and learn how to carry out simple additions and subtractions, acquiring valuable life skills. They recognise an increasing number of words and can match them with corresponding pictures and symbols.
- While activities are mostly matched closely to students' understanding, there are a few occasions where this does not happen. In these cases, students have not developed a sufficiently firm foundation in the specific aspect and activities are too difficult for them. Consequently, activities need to be repeated and the rate of progress is slower.
- Students supported by additional funding make the same rate of progress as other students in both English and mathematics. Funding has been used effectively to provide additional equipment that helps to improve their communication. Additional teaching support is also provided to improve reading and writing and mathematical skills for those most in need. The funding is also used to enable students to take part in additional activities such as sailing, improving their communication and social skills.
- There is no difference in achievement between students from minority ethnic groups and other students; all achieve equally well. Those who speak English as an additional language also make good progress. Girls and boys achieve equally well with no significant difference in their attainment.
- All students follow recognised courses and are able to gain national awards. The older students gain accreditation following work-based courses at college or work placements. For all students there is a focus on developing their functional skills, enabling them to become more independent.
- Students take part in a wide range of sporting activities, exercise regularly at breaktimes and benefit from good opportunities to develop physical skills through outward-bound type activities.

The sixth form provision is good

- Students achieve well in the sixth form. The school is effective in preparing them well for the next stage in their life, whether it be college or work placements or to provide them with the skills to improve their independence. Excellent transition arrangements ensure learning programmes are matched to the aspirations of individual students. The school is very successful in enabling students to gain college placements when they leave.
- The curriculum provides students with very good opportunities to improve their basic skills and to take part in work-related activities. The school has developed close links with local employers where students are able to get 'hands on' experience of work and which greatly improves their chances of paid employment.
- Teaching is consistently good. Work is well matched to students' individual needs. Courses held off site at the various colleges are considered carefully to ensure they match the students' needs. The school closely tracks students' achievement to ensure they are on track to meet their targets. Learning journals provide a detailed record of their progress. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to students' progress. They know the students well and provide tailored support. Very occasionally, activities are too challenging for some students so that they do not make the more rapid progress of which are capable.
- Students behave well and enjoy learning. They particularly enjoy practical activities where they can improve their life skills. They work well with one another and are proud of their own and each other's achievements. Opportunities to sail on the 'tall ships' provide students with wonderful social experiences.
- There are robust systems in place which ensure students' safety on the school site, on college courses and on work placements. Students are provided with considerable guidance on how to stay safe, for example when using the internet.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Leaders have developed the curriculum so that it

matches the needs of students.

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	104272
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	447923
Type of school	Special
School category	Community Special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	115
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	25
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	June Moriarty
Headteacher	Adrian Coleman
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 June 2012
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