

Palmerston School

Beaconsfield Road, Woolton, Liverpool, Merseyside, L25 6EE

Inspection dates 18–19 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher, senior leaders', teachers' and governors' unflinching pursuit of excellence is reflected in the continuing outstanding quality of teaching and of students' achievement.
- Middle leaders work very closely with the senior leadership team. They ensure the curriculum is sensitively matched to the needs and abilities of every student, which results in exceptional development, progress and attainment for all.
- Teaching is outstanding. Very well-planned and creative activities engage students exceptionally well and make learning exciting and enjoyable.
- From their low starting points, students make excellent progress in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Students make outstanding progress in communication because of the highly effective use of signs and symbols. The most able students make excellent progress in reading and writing. However, there are not enough opportunities for students to use their skills in phonics (the sounds that letters and combination of letters make) and early reading to support their writing in subjects other than English.
- Progress in mathematics is outstanding. Carefully selected practical activities are challenging and relevant to individual needs, enabling all groups to achieve extremely well.
- Sixth form provision is exceptional and students make outstanding progress over time.
- The highly effective sixth form enables all students to gain a wide range of qualifications and benefit from some impressive vocational and work-related placements.
- Rigorous and highly effective systems check students' progress and anyone who falls behind quickly catches up.
- The governing body has an excellent understanding and accurate view of the school's work. Governors ensure safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.
- The school is held in very high regard by the local authority. Parents are overwhelmingly pleased with the school.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well indeed.
- Students display exemplary behaviour and enjoy attending school. They say they feel very safe, are happy and well looked after in school.
- As students progress through the school they grow in confidence and maturity and this prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors visited all classes and carried out observations jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors spoke formally and informally to students, listened to their views about school and their aspirations for the next stage in their education.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's work and considered a range of documentation, including documents relating to the performance of individual students, their written work, school improvement planning, minutes of governing body meetings and procedures for safeguarding and for monitoring attendance.
- Inspectors took account of the 20 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and also responses from completed staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Maureen Coleman, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Marilyn Massey

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Palmerston School serves the city of Liverpool and provides for students aged 11 to 19 with severe learning difficulties. Many students have associated difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorders and communication difficulties.
- The headteacher is a National Leader in Education and the school is a nationally accredited Teaching School and provides support for other schools.
- There is a high proportion of disadvantaged students. These students are eligible for support through the pupil premium funding. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- Students come from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds, the large majority of which are White British. Very few students speak English as an additional language.
- The school holds the Basic Skills award and has Healthy School status. It is also an Investor in Careers and has the Career Connect Quality Mark.
- The school uses Young Persons Opportunity Project as an alternative provision to enable work-based learning opportunities in Key Stage 4 and Connections to organise work experience placements in sixth form. It does not use early entry for GCSE.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve achievement in writing by increasing opportunities for students to use their phonics skills to support their writing in subjects other than English.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- All leaders work tirelessly to improve all aspects of school. As a result, students' achievement in English and mathematics is outstanding.
- The headteacher is highly motivated to drive the school forward. Together with the senior leaders, she communicates very high expectations and is ambitious in seeking new ways to improve the outcomes for all students. The leadership of teaching is outstanding.
- Highly effective middle leaders, together with the senior leaders, know the school very well and provide and promote excellence in teaching and learning across the school.
- The local authority provides good support to the leadership team and holds the school, appropriately, in very high regard.
- Assessment procedures for checking students' progress are innovative, robust and highly effective. This ensures that achievements of all students are regularly assessed and appropriate support is quickly put in place if needed.
- Leaders are excellent role models for students. Through their positive encouragement and consistency in applying systems for managing behaviour, they contribute significantly to the very positive learning environment which permeates the school.
- Leaders are continuously challenged by the governing body and this ensures there is no room for complacency. The school successfully builds on existing outstanding practice and provides support and guidance for other schools through its Teaching School status.
- Staff morale is very high. The staff are fully committed and focussed on school improvement. They welcome opportunities to engage in professional training to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date.
- Leaders at all levels contribute to an ethos and culture where students thrive and feel safe. The emphasis on equality of opportunity for all is paramount and the school works hard to foster good relations with everyone and to tackle discrimination in all its forms.
- The curriculum is excellent because it is skilfully adapted to meet the differing needs of all students. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of all the school does and it prepares students very well for life in modern Britain, including by giving them an understanding of cultural diversity.
- Core British values of tolerance and respect are emphasised across all aspects of school life and instances of bullying are very rare.
- Additional funding, including the pupil premium, is used very well to provide bespoke interventions where needed and to enhance the curriculum with exciting and stimulating experiences. These include residential and sporting activities, which students greatly enjoy and appreciate.
- Transition arrangements and careers advice given to students in the sixth form are a strength of the school. They are very well managed and highly effective.
- Procedures for setting targets for teachers are rigorous and leaders ensure that salary increases are not awarded unless staff have met their targets based on students' progress. Staff are fully aware of their accountability for student achievement.
- The monitoring of the progress, behaviour and attendance of those students attending the alternative provision is rigorous.
- Safeguarding requirements are well established, highly effective and fully meet requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The highly effective and committed governing body knows the school exceptionally well. It has an excellent understanding of the school's data and confidently holds the senior leaders to account about the school's performance.
 - Governors regularly check on the effectiveness of the school's work and are determined to do everything possible to meet the needs of every student.
 - Governors have an accurate view of the impact of teaching on students' learning. They gather first-hand evidence from their frequent visits to school and from talking to students, parents and staff. They ensure teachers are appropriately rewarded for good performance related to their teaching and students' achievement. They ensure that teachers only receive salary increases if their students meet their achievement targets.
 - Governors attend relevant training and have a good range of skills which they use to benefit the school.
 - Good management of finances ensures additional funding received from the government is spent wisely and has a significant impact on the personal and academic, achievements of the students for whom it is

intended.

- The governing body fulfils all its statutory duties in relation to safeguarding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Some students enter school displaying very challenging behaviour as a result of wider difficulties. The consistent application of the highly successful behaviour policy means that, over time, much of this challenging behaviour is moderated and consequently does not have a negative impact on learning across school.
- Students enjoy learning because tasks are matched closely to their needs and abilities. They show interest and engagement in lessons which assists their excellent progress across different subjects. For instance, in a mathematics lesson, students learned to follow instructions to solve problems. These skills were then put to good use later in the day during a cookery lesson when they successfully made soda bread. This transfer of mathematical skills to real-life situations provides excellent preparation for independent living and thus for life in modern Britain.
- Attendance is above average with very little unauthorised absence. Any authorised absence is a result of medical conditions and resultant treatment for some students. Attendance of sixth-formers at work placements is also above average.
- The school successfully engages with all parents. Coffee mornings, support groups and the exchange of regular information keep parents well informed about their children's learning.
- Students' exemplary behaviour has a positive impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as they progress through the school. Students in the sixth form are excellent role models for younger students and are very proud to be members of the school community.
- Students have a good understanding of the high expectations the school has for their behaviour. The sticker reward system used in many classes for exceptional behaviour and progress impacts positively on students' concentration and engagement, allowing lessons to flow and learning to take place.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- Students feel very safe and are treated with the utmost respect and dignity by everyone.
- Students' views and concerns are given due consideration. Students on the school council report directly to the governing body about any school safety or behaviour issues. They are confident that governors will respond to their concerns in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Comprehensive and established safety policies and procedures are fully in place and promote the safety of students and staff exceptionally well.
- All students are fully aware of the different forms of bullying, including homophobic, racist, and other forms of bullying based on prejudice. They know how to keep themselves safe, including on the internet.
- The behaviour and safety of students attending the alternative provision is outstanding.
- The trusting and highly effective relationships students have with staff, and each other, are a strength of the school. Students readily help each other and celebrate each other's successes. School is a fun place to be and the provision of sensitive care and guidance for each student is paramount.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The school's monitoring of students' progress, their work and engagement during lessons and written work in their books clearly demonstrate that teaching over time, across all subjects, including in the sixth form, is outstanding overall.
- Ongoing assessments are used well to adapt and re-direct learning activities to enable students to make very good progress towards their individual targets. This is further supported by detailed and thorough marking, clearly supporting the students' next steps in their learning.
- Behaviour is managed exceptionally well and contributes significantly to students' attitudes towards learning. The perseverance and care students take over the presentation of their work are exceptional.
- Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught exceptionally well. However, there are limited opportunities for students to use their phonics skills to support their writing in other subjects and this means that although outstanding overall, students' achievement is not as high in writing as in reading

and mathematics.

- High levels of support in literacy through the effective use of photographs, signing, symbols and technical aids are impressive and contribute very well to the development of students' communication skills.
- Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. For example, in a Spanish lesson students were challenged to answer questions in Spanish about the sequence of events in a story. They responded with confidence and understanding and were able to use their prior knowledge of Spanish vocabulary to support their answers.
- Relationships between teachers and their teaching assistants are outstanding. Together they create powerful learning teams who work individually with students, pitching activities at just the correct level. Consequently, every student is supported and challenged to make rapid progress.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Due to the complexity of students' learning difficulties, their attainment when they first join the school is significantly below average compared to schools nationally. However, from their individual starting points, all students make outstanding progress in reading, writing, communication and mathematics.
- Progress in other subjects is equally as strong and students demonstrate excellent attitudes towards learning.
- There is no significant difference in achievement between different groups of students, including those known to be eligible for support through additional funding, the most able and also those from minority ethnic heritages.
- All students are assessed in depth when they first join the school and progress is measured from their individual starting points. The school uses a variety of methods to assess students' current levels of attainment, which provide very detailed information for teachers. This information is used creatively by teachers to target work at the correct level for every student, including those whose progress is measured in very small steps. This careful system helps to ensure all groups of pupils make the best possible progress.
- Students' progress in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally strong. Students demonstrate enjoyment and fascination in taking part in different learning experiences. In addition, they show an increasing willingness to participate in a variety of social settings, co-operating very well with others and portraying the necessary skills to resolve conflicts effectively. A good example of this was during a dance lesson where students were required to work together to complete a sequence of dance moves in time to music from Brazil.
- All students are successful in attaining a range of external accreditation and an increasing number are successful in gaining Entry Level awards. The range of subjects gained at Entry Level has also increased over time. Furthermore, for the first time, students now gain GCSE qualifications in information and communication technology.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- Students in the sixth form are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education or training because of the excellent help and support they receive from school.
- Overall, the behaviour and safety of students in the sixth form is outstanding.
- All students gain at least one qualification before they leave school and some acquire many more.
- The broad range of academic and vocational subjects available to students, including functional skills in literacy and numeracy, contribute significantly to equipping them with the necessary skills for independent living.
- Highly effective and appropriate work placements are secured for all students in a range of venues to help them prepare for future employment and life in modern Britain. The school monitors students' progress closely during these placements and ensures they are safe.
- Students are offered many experiences to develop independence and respect for others. For example, they are given the opportunity to take part in joint lesson observations with staff and contribute to the future planning and development of the school.
- Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Teachers plan exceptionally well to meet the differing needs of students and build good relationships with them founded on mutual respect.
- Leadership in the sixth form is exemplary. Leaders are passionate about providing the very best for all students, enabling them to make rapid progress in all areas of learning, experience challenging work and

do the best they can.

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	104748
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	448158

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carol Chapman
Headteacher	Lis Burbage
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2009
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