

INSPECTION REPORT

MARY ELLIOT SCHOOL

Walsall

LEA area: Walsall

Unique reference number: 104272

Headteacher: Mrs Elizabeth Jordan

Reporting inspector: Mrs Kathy Hooper
2971

Dates of inspection: 19-20 September 2000

Inspection number: 223622

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special: for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties
Type of control:	Maintained, community
Age range of pupils:	13-19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Brewer Street Walsall West Midlands WS2 8BA
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Name of chairman of governors:	Mr R Folks
Date of previous inspection:	29 April-2 May 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of special school:	For pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties
Age range:	13-19 years
Number of pupils:	59 (32 boys and 27 girls)
Pupils with English as an additional language:	25% (above average)
Pupils entitled to free school meals:	50% (above average)
Number of pupils for each teacher:	6.3
Number of pupils for each full time adult:	4.5
Number of pupils with statements of special needs:	59

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is providing a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. It has some good aspects and some that are very good. There are some aspects which require improvement. These include the curriculum, the timetable and the deployment of staff. In some cases pupils' targets are insufficiently well defined.

What the school does well

- The ethos of the school is very good. A committed staff values the pupils by treating them with respect and demonstrating concern for their well-being.
- The headteacher leads and manages the school well. Governors are very well informed about the work of the school and fully involved in its development.
- Pupils' individual needs were well met in lessons where the teaching was good or very good.
- Pupils develop very good social and personal skills, they behave very well and have good attitudes to their learning.
- There is good attendance.
- Support staff make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning.

What could be improved

- The breadth and balance of the curriculum limits the progress that pupils make in developing their basic skills.
- Some teaching lacks clarity about what the pupils are intended to learn. The quality of all teaching should be brought up to the level of the best.
- Staff are not always efficiently deployed. The roles of senior and middle managers are not well developed.
- Poor time-keeping by the Local Education Authority's (LEA's) school transport limits the length of the school day for some pupils.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the last inspection, the school has made sound progress in responding to those key issues, which do not involve the LEA. The standards of teaching are similar to those in the previous report and standards in information and communication technology and design and technology have improved. The English policy has been updated and there is better provision for communication. The Special Educational Needs policy is in place. Additional staff have been employed and the management structure strengthened. There have been clear improvements in whole school planning. However, on occasions, some teachers are not efficiently deployed.

Additional improvements include:

- A system of accreditation for post-16 pupils has been developed.
- There are better systems for monitoring the work of the school.
- The work of the support staff has been developed as an element of the Beacon activities.
- Homework packs have been developed to encourage greater parental involvement.
- There have been improvements in the teaching of personal and social education.
- Provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties has been strengthened.

The issues for the LEA remain un-addressed. These include amending and up-dating pupils' statements, developing a long term plan for the accommodation, improving the punctuality of the school transport, improving support from external agencies and reviewing the age of transfer.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

Progress in:	by age	by age	Key
	16	19	
speaking and listening	B	C	very good A
Reading	B	C	good B
Writing	C	C	satisfactory C
Mathematics	B	C	unsatisfactory D
personal, social and health education	B	B	poor E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	C	C	

*IEPs are individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs

Pupils aged 14-16 make good progress in their communication skills, numeracy and information and communication technology. Post-16 pupils make sound progress. All pupils acquire relevant knowledge about how to care for themselves and about healthy living. About a third of Post-16 pupils gain external accreditation for their achievements. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties make sound progress.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils are keen to learn and eager to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils are very well behaved in class and at break and lunchtimes.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils are tolerant, patient and co-operative.
Attendance	Good, although transport arrangements are poor.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 13-16	aged over 16
Lessons seen overall	good	satisfactory

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

In all lessons seen the teaching was at least satisfactory. In about half of all lessons, pupils made good progress. In the better lessons, pupils undertake well prepared work appropriate for their age and abilities. There is good teamwork between teachers and support staff and a collaborative approach to learning. Teachers provide relevant activities and use varied approaches to maintain pupils' interest and enjoyment. Some lessons, however, lack clarity about what pupils are meant to learn and work finishes too early. As a consequence, pupils in these lessons are not stimulated sufficiently and are left unoccupied for too long.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The range is satisfactory, but there is insufficient emphasis on communication and numeracy in all activities. Limitations in the timetable result in the poor use of time on occasions.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory, although there is no specialist provision.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. There are particular strengths in moral, social and cultural development. Spiritual development is satisfactory however assemblies do not make a sufficient contribution.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Pupils' needs and sensitivities are respected. All staff are committed to promoting the well-being of all pupils.

Although the curriculum is satisfactory, the school needs to make more effective use of time for learning and teaching. The school's warm and enabling ethos is supported by the good quality of care for the pupils' well-being.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is well led and managed by the headteacher. The roles of middle and senior managers require further development.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Good. Governors are well informed and active in managing the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory and improving due to the monitoring systems, which are now in place.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. Improvements in the use of the accommodation and resources have been beneficial. The deployment and use of staff should be reviewed.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their child likes school. • The school is approachable. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information about their child's progress.

Inspectors confirmed that pupils enjoy school. Inspectors found the school to be responsive to parents' questions and problems and judged the school to be well led and managed. Inspectors judged that the school was developing good systems for giving appropriate information to parents about their children's progress.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The ethos of the school is very good. A committed staff values the pupils by treating them with respect and demonstrating concern for their well-being.

1. The school is very successful in creating a warm and positive atmosphere within which pupils thrive and make progress. Pupils are greeted individually as they arrive in the morning and when they leave in the afternoon. Whole school assemblies each morning create a sense of belonging to a community and pupils are happy to be at school. Pupils' absence from school is often due to their medical conditions. Pupils are treated with respect by all the staff and great efforts are made to make the learning relevant. Pupils are given appropriate responsibilities and some older pupils organise a tuck shop. Teachers and support staff note and celebrate pupils' achievements in class and in assemblies.
2. A strong feature of the school is the quality of relationships and the provision for pupils' moral and social development. Pupils are encouraged to take care of each other, for example, by being patient and tolerant. The individual needs of pupils are well known to staff who support pupils' well-being very successfully. Challenging behaviour is well managed. The staff have a consistent approach which enables pupils to develop good attitudes to learning and very good behaviour. All staff have a powerful influence on pupil's social development. The competent leadership by the headteacher and the involvement of governors in the work of the school are influential in generating a positive climate within which teachers, support staff and pupils work productively. There is a clear and consistent code of conduct throughout the school and it is demonstrated through all activities. Adults are good role models for pupils and consequently pupils know right from wrong. Staff morale is high and the school is a happy place to be in.

Pupils' individual needs were well met in the lessons where the teaching was good or very good.

3. In about half of all lessons across the school, the teaching is at least good. In the best lessons, teachers identified different activities and outcomes that related well to pupils' individual education plans. Their literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, personal and social targets were well reinforced within activities which were relevant and enjoyable for pupils. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils were encouraged to name the tools and estimate spoonfuls when they were counting to divide and share out fruit. Pupils were encouraged to work co-operatively in groups. In good lessons, pupils used information and communication technology to help them to complete tasks successfully.
4. Good teachers use real objects to make the learning easier for pupils. For example, cards showing the names of the different parts of the computer were placed on a computer to help pupils to understand. Pupils' learning was particularly successful where teachers had good specialist knowledge coupled with a sensitive awareness of how to present information at an appropriate level for individual pupils. Significant learning was noted throughout the lesson to help teachers plan future learning.
5. Good teachers used time very well. Planning detailed several stages where different activities were introduced before pupils' concentration was exhausted. Lessons were, therefore, well paced. Skilful questioning by teachers and support staff helped pupils to extend and develop their learning. Pupils were given time to respond to questions in their own way. The activities and methods used ensured that pupils were successful. Pupils' confidence and interest was maintained through the judicious use of praise, feedback and humour so that pupils were able to begin to understand why they were successful. Wherever possible, pupils were given responsibility through a collaborative approach for their learning. For example, they looked for foods with which they could experiment when looking at the effects of water on everyday substances.
6. In order to extend pupils' learning, the school has developed homework packs. These contain very helpful information to enable parents to work with their children at home. These have been thoroughly researched through monitoring and evaluating their use by parents. They are much appreciated by parents and have had a favourable impact on pupils' progress.
7. The appointment of a co-ordinator for the learning of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties has had a beneficial impact on provision for this group of pupils. There is a growing awareness of the needs of these pupils among staff. When these pupils are taught by the co-ordinator, they make good progress.

Pupils develop very good social and personal skills.

8. The school places a strong and successful emphasis on preparing pupils for life after school. Targets for pupils' personal and social development are well framed and records show good progress. Pupils are encouraged to develop skills that enable them to cook for themselves, use domestic equipment such as a washing machine and to take care of their personal needs, for example, washing hair or shaving. Pupils learn particularly rapidly when the activities are set within a relevant context as in the accredited modules of work in the post-16 classes.
9. During lunchtimes, pupils are encouraged to make conversation, to eat in a socially acceptable way and to interact socially with others. Lunchtimes are pleasant and relaxed occasions.
10. The staff share a consistent approach to issues and values. Teachers and support staff often work very well as a team. Relationships throughout the school generate a strong sense of teamwork among the staff and pupils. Personal and social skills are well extended and developed in all settings because adults know the pupils very well.

Support staff make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning

11. In lessons, support staff contribute positively to the pupils' learning. They question pupils well to enable them to understand, they are aware of individual needs and provide confident support to pupils and teachers. Many support staff give positive feedback to pupils which helps them to become successful. Nursery nurses are used to complete assessments of pupils. A member of the support staff has expertise in information and communication technology and plays a significant role in helping pupils to become confident when using computers. On rare occasions, support staff are passive in lessons because they are new so do not know, as yet, how to help pupils to learn.
12. There is a strong emphasis on the provision of a multi-disciplinary approach to the care of pupils. This arrangement has a number of benefits. Pupils' needs are better met, for example, physical arrangements in classrooms are improved to help pupils be more at ease. Staff learn from specialists, such as the physiotherapist, how to work with pupils who have complex learning difficulties. As a result, pupils make good progress in their ability to control movements and relax. Pupils are, therefore, able to participate more fully in group activities.
13. Support staff are centrally involved in the pastoral care of pupils. Each pupil has a key worker who is one of the nursery nurses. The school nurse provides good support to parents and their children. For example, she contributes to the curriculum through health education when promoting strategies for healthy living and she works with the parent liaison teacher on home visits. Dinner staff, too, know the pupils well and play an important role in generating a pleasant and productive experience for pupils at mealtimes.

Governors' involvement on the work of the school

14. Governors are very well informed about the school. They are fully involved in whole school planning and evaluating expenditure in relation to the school development plan. A selected group of governors is involved in classroom observations to identify how well pupils respond to the lessons. Teachers appreciate their views and governors gain detailed knowledge of the work of the school. A rolling curriculum review of subjects through co-ordinators has been established. Governors are very familiar with developments, understand how the school is improving and have realistic views about further development.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The breadth and balance of the curriculum

15. The curriculum is intended to reflect the school's aims and objectives and to provide pupils with access to the National Curriculum. The school's priorities include updating the curriculum in line with Curriculum 2000. The school is taking steps to improve the curriculum and resources for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. However, pupils do not always receive daily experiences which systematically extend their literacy and numeracy skills. The school intends that these skills should be reinforced through integrated activities but the lack of detailed planning for individuals in these lessons often means that opportunities are missed. Curriculum co-ordinators are involved in monitoring planning and outcomes from lessons but this is a paper exercise and insufficiently sharply focused on outcomes from pupils' learning.
16. The breadth and balance of the curriculum is further affected by the way in which time is used. Buses are frequently late and this denies pupils a significant amount of time for their learning. This was an issue in the previous inspection and, although the school has tried to improve the situation, it is still the case. Too much time devoted to preparing pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties for their journey home encroaches further on the time in lessons.
17. On occasions, lessons are planned that are too long to sustain pupils' interest. This is particularly obvious in the afternoons. In these cases, teachers use extra activities to fill the time rather than planning well-focused activities that extend pupils' learning. The daily assemblies promote a good sense of community. However, they do little to promote pupils' spiritual development.
18. Time is lost at the beginning of the year particularly for those pupils who are new to the school. This is due to the inadequacy of records of previous learning. The majority of new pupils this year have very complex learning difficulties and specialist teachers do not always have a sufficiently wide range of skills to address their needs. However, attempts are being made to establish comprehensive baseline assessments in order to measure progress more precisely.

Improve teaching to bring the quality of all teaching up to the level of the best. Some teaching lacks clarity about what the pupils are intended to learn.

19. In a few lessons seen, strengths and weaknesses were finely balanced but overall strengths outweighed the weaknesses. In these lessons, planning was too general and did not identify what individual pupils would do. The language used was too complicated for pupils to understand. Pupils were too passive for too long. Assessments and records of past work were too general to give information which could have shaped future planning. As a consequence, all pupils were engaged in the same activity and the progress of some was not as good as it might have been. Literacy and numeracy were not extended or reinforced.
20. At the time of the inspection the system for target setting was being modified. The new system is better focused on the key skills of literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, personal and social education. It is intended that these will be reviewed half-termly and evaluated termly. Although the new targets are more measurable, many are still too general for teachers to use as a focus for planning lessons. Where lessons were only satisfactory, subject specialists often missed opportunities for using pupils' targets to help them to shape lessons which met the needs of all pupils.
21. Appropriate emphasis is placed on pupils' personal and social skills such as drying up or cleaning sinks or shoes. However, in some lessons these skills are practised in isolation. Pupils made much better progress in lessons where the need for these skills was obvious, for example, when pupils were preparing food.

Staff are not always efficiently deployed. The roles of senior and middle managers are not well developed.

22. In some lessons, teachers are not used to best advantage. For example, two teachers take some groups of pupils but they all do similar activities. This leads to adults and pupils being passive for longer periods than is necessary. On other occasions, a senior member of the staff takes groups of pupils out shopping. In both cases, a review of teacher deployment would identify more effective ways of using teachers' time.

23. An effective system for monitoring the work of the school is developing. The school is aware of areas for development as a result of thorough analysis of school practices. However, although co-ordinators have non-contact time, their monitoring does not include classroom observation of lessons. Opportunities for sharing good practice, therefore, are limited.
24. The headteacher and governors lead and manage well. Opportunities for developing management skills among staff are, however, limited.

WHAT THE SCHOOL SHOULD DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

25. The governing body and senior management team should strengthen the curriculum offered to pupils by:
 - Ensuring that all pupils have daily experiences of the key skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology and integrate them into the planning for all subjects;
 - Review the use of time to improve pupils' rate of progress;
 - Extend opportunities for spiritual development;
 - Devise quicker ways of establishing previous learning for new pupils.
(paragraphs 15-18)
26. The senior management team should improve the quality of teaching further by:
 - Making pupils' targets more specific and measurable by stating clearly what is to be learned;
 - Improving planning so that teachers are clear about what is to be taught, what it is intended that pupils should learn, how to manage time in lessons and how pupils' work is to be assessed and recorded;
 - Ensuring that co-ordinators have a clear role in the monitoring of learning and teaching.
(paragraphs 19-21)
27. The headteacher and governors should make more efficient use of expensive resources by:
 - Reviewing how staff are deployed;
 - Developing the monitoring systems to provide opportunities for staff to learn the skills of management at senior and middle levels.
(paragraphs 22-24)
28. The Governing Body, in liaison with the LEA, should, as a matter of urgency:
 - address the poor time keeping of the transport for pupils.
(paragraph 16)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	22
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	16

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	14	32	54	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	59
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	29

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	15

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	0
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	84

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	5
Pakistani	8
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	0
White	42
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y9– Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6.3
Average class size	11.8

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	372

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		0
Black – African heritage		0
Black – other		0
Indian		0
Pakistani		0
Bangladeshi		0
Chinese		0
White		0
Other minority ethnic groups		0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Financial information

Financial year	1999
	£
Total income	605,613
Total expenditure	585,495
Expenditure per pupil	9,924
Balance brought forward from previous year	25,063
Balance carried forward to next year	45,181

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	59
Number of questionnaires returned	23

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	35	0	9	4
My child is making good progress in school.	45	36	4	0	14
Behaviour in the school is good.	56	26	0	0	17
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	55	5	0	5
The teaching is good.	54	27	4	0	14
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	52	26	17	4	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	65	22	9	4	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	52	30	0	0	17
The school works closely with parents.	45	36	14	4	0
The school is well led and managed.	52	30	0	0	17
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	52	30	0	0	17
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	30	13	4	13

Other issues raised by parents

The positive view of the school reflected in the questionnaire was a feature of the comments by parents. One parent commented that there was not enough information about their child's progress and this was echoed by some other parents at their meeting.