



inspection report

The Michael Tippett School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 133442
LEA Lambeth

Inspection number 274740
Inspection dates 20 and 21 April 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs G Fox HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Community	School address	Oakden Street
School category	Special		Kennington
Age range of pupils	11 to 19 years		London
			SE11 4UG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 7735 9081
Number on roll	66	Fax number	020 7735 9082
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs R Downing
Date of previous inspection	January 2003	Headteacher	Ms J Stogdon

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 19 years	3 June 2005	274740

Introduction

When The Michael Tippett School was inspected in January 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on five occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in April 2005.

Description of the school

The Michael Tippett School is a day special school in Lambeth for pupils with a range of complex needs, catering for up to 80 pupils aged 11 to 19, but which at present has 66 pupils (29 girls and 37 boys). Nearly a quarter of the pupils are in the post-16 department. Pupils enter the school with very low levels of attainment for their age. About a quarter of the pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), nearly half have severe learning difficulties (SLD), and a quarter have autism (with SLD). A small number have other special educational needs, such as physical difficulties. Just over two thirds of the pupils, a high proportion, are entitled to free school meals. A third of the pupils are from white backgrounds. Two thirds are from minority ethnic groups: the majority of these are of Black British-Caribbean or African origin. There are also small numbers of pupils from Bangladeshi and other Asian backgrounds. Around a third of the pupils come from homes where English is not the first language; the majority speak Bengali, Portuguese, Twi or Cantonese. Almost all of these are at an early stage of learning English. The school operates on two sites which are about five miles apart; the post-16 pupils and a group of Key Stage 4 pupils are educated on the West Norwood site. The Key Stage 3 pupils and most of the Key Stage 4 pupils are educated on the main school site at Kennington.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

The Michael Tippett School is an effective school which provides a good standard of education and care for its pupils. The effectiveness of the school has improved significantly over the last two years, largely as a result of the hard work of the headteacher who is committed to securing improvements in all aspects of the school's work. She provides very good leadership and management and the staff work well together under her guidance. The quality of teaching has improved and the pupils are making good progress over time in many subjects. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are mostly good. They respond well to the high levels of individual attention and support. Standards of personal care are good. The curriculum is developing well and there is an improving range of opportunities for the pupils. Although the split-site accommodation is unsatisfactory, the school is making best use of the current premises. The post-16 centre, which is on a separate site, has improved many aspects of its provision. The school has developed reasonable links with some local schools.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of January 2003 required the school to address key issues concerned with the leadership and management, teaching and learning, the pupils' progress, accommodation, curriculum, links with parents, health and safety and attendance. There has been good progress in relation to all of the key issues except for accommodation, which remains a key issue for the school.

Capacity to improve

The school is well placed to improve. The headteacher is committed to making further improvements in all aspects of the school's work and she has written a robust improvement plan. She has focused strongly on improving the quality of teaching and learning and on the achievement of the pupils. She has been supported very well by the associate adviser from the local education authority (LEA), who has been particularly effective in securing improvements in the quality of teaching. The headteacher provides very good leadership and management but she carries a relatively heavy operational workload as the senior management of the school is at an early stage of development. Subject leadership for mathematics and science is reasonable but, as a result of high staff turnover, it is not secure in English or information and communication technology (ICT). There are effective procedures for monitoring the school's progress and for supporting individual education plans. The post-16 provision runs efficiently and effectively under the leadership of the newly-appointed assistant headteacher; staff work well together and are identifying the most effective ways of supporting individual pupils. Partnership work with other local schools is developing well.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan are to:

- continue to strengthen the management of the school so that the headteacher has good operational support;
- improve the subject co-ordination for English and ICT;
- further improve the accommodation to bring the two sites of the school closer;
- continue to develop the assessment and evaluation of the pupils' progress.

Achievement and standards

The pupils have a range of needs from severe learning difficulties to profound and multiple learning difficulties and a number have autistic spectrum disorders. Most of the pupils are making good progress over time in the subjects taught at the school as a result of better teaching and a curriculum which is more closely aligned with their needs. Overall they make the greatest progress when they undertake active learning tasks or when multi-sensory methods are used. Challenging targets are set in most subjects and most pupils make good progress as a result of high expectations. The use of ICT across the school has improved and is helping to promote the pupils' progress.

Most pupils make at least satisfactory progress and in some subjects they make good progress. Progress was good in half of the lessons. Although severe communication difficulties are limiting the pace of learning for some of the pupils, in the better lessons the teachers are attuned well to the language and communication levels of the pupils and adapt their teaching methods skillfully to promote progress.

Personal development

When the school became subject to special measures in 2003, the behaviour of the pupils was not a significant concern, although there were signs of frustration and boredom from some pupils as a result of ineffective strategies for managing their behaviour and teaching that was not stimulating enough. This had an adverse effect on rates of progress. Overall the attitudes and behaviour of the pupils both in lessons and around the school have improved as a result of higher expectations, better teaching and more consistent routines. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are at least satisfactory and often good. In over half of the lessons, behaviour was good; the pupils co-operated well with their teachers and responded well to encouragement.

There remains a minority of pupils whose behaviour is particularly challenging. In the main, the staff are working well with these pupils and several have become more settled as a

result of sensitive and consistent management. Effective staff training has been beneficial in promoting consistency in behaviour management and the school has improved its systems for making flexible arrangements for pupils who are experiencing particular difficulties.

Lunchtimes in the dining room have improved significantly over the last two years. The dining area has been extended sensitively to allow for one sitting rather than two. The lunch break has been shortened providing more time for personal, social and health education plus citizenship (PSHE+C). An end-of-school session for pupils in Key Stage 4 provided a satisfactory end to the school day. Relaxing music was used to reasonable effect and the staff spoke in soothing tones to the pupils but opportunities were lost for this to be fully effective as a multi-sensory experience.

A senior speech and language therapist works with the school for two and a half days each week; however, the teachers do not always know when to expect this support because of problems with the timetable. The therapist has a good understanding of the pupils' communication needs and is working appropriately with the staff in class to improve their use of the Picture Exchange Communication System [PECS]. Training sessions have been beneficial and some teachers are using PECS well to enable the pupils to make choices while some assistants have yet to improve their skills in using this approach.

Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A range of events are organised to broaden and develop the pupils' grasp of their own culture and other heritages; for example, they enjoyed celebrating the Chinese New Year. Assemblies provide good opportunities for the pupils to share what they have been doing during the day or to commemorate particular occasions. The social development of the pupils is promoted well through opportunities to visit local shops and through sessions at the local swimming pool. The link with a local secondary school enables the pupils to use the sports facilities there. The pupils take part in a range of suitable cultural visits; for example, a group visited a local theatre to meet the actors and participate in a workshop.

The commitment of the staff to supporting the personal development of the pupils is a strength of the school. A number of the pupils face complex difficulties in their lives. Any troubling issues affecting their education are swiftly identified and very good efforts are made to support the pupils and resolve any problems. Good links with parents and carers are fostered by the parent liaison officer.

PSHE+C is taught through a thematic approach with cross-curricular links. Topics are relevant to the pupils' needs. In the absence of a permanent co-ordinator, this subject has been led by a senior teacher who is knowledgeable and enthusiastic. The pupils show interest in the subject and are gaining knowledge and increased awareness, for example, of how their bodies function.

The attendance rate has stabilised and is currently 87 per cent. Most pupils attend regularly and there is very little unauthorised attendance. The rate of authorised absences is 11.4 per cent; most of this is generated by a minority of students with very complex medical needs. Procedures for monitoring attendance and following up absences are good. Staff

have worked conscientiously with parents, social services and the education welfare services to promote the attendance of a small minority of pupils who are long-term absentees. They have had particular success with several pupils. The LEA is making appropriate alternative arrangements for pupils who have not attended for over a year.

Quality of provision

The overall profile of teaching has improved significantly since the inspection in January 2003 and this accounts for the faster progress that the pupils are making. In all but one of the lessons, the teaching was at least satisfactory and it was good or very good in over half.

Lesson planning has improved significantly and was mostly good. Most of the teachers have improved their focus on what the pupils will learn. The better plans provided clear details of individual learning objectives and there was a sharper focus on the needs and interests of individuals. In a minority of lessons, there was insufficient evaluation of what the pupils understood. There is improved consistency in the way lessons are taught; for example, in signalling the start and endings of lessons.

Most of the teachers engage the pupils well through the use of interactive tasks and effective resources. The improved use of communication aids, real objects, signs and symbols is enlivening the teaching and enhancing the pupils' understanding. The teachers have improved their skills in signing and it was used consistently for supporting those pupils for whom it was appropriate; four assistants have particular skills in signing. There have been significant improvements in the use of ICT to support the teaching, including interactive whiteboards and switches. A refurbished ICT suite is being used regularly for lessons and ICT was used in most other lessons as a helpful aid to learning.

The teaching assistants are improving their contribution to the pupils' learning and are taking more active roles in supporting group work; for example, in developing the communication skills of the lowest attaining pupils. The teachers are providing better guidance for their contributions to lessons and there are suitable plans for further development through training. There was very good involvement of support staff in some lessons although a small minority of the assistants lack initiative. Some assistants continue to work very well with pupils whose behaviour is difficult to manage. However, a minority are still doing too much for the pupils and are hindering the development of their independence.

The learning environment is bright, clean and tidy and there are better storage facilities for the wide range of equipment. The quality of display has improved and there are a number of stimulating multi-sensory displays and large pictures which brighten the corridors on both sites. The use of relaxing music in some areas enhances the experience of the pupils.

The curriculum policy has been improved significantly and has become a comprehensive document with clear guidance on subject teaching, assessment and planning. The school has developed its curriculum for Key Stages 3 and 4 and has introduced an effective cross-curricular approach to the foundation subjects. As a result, the curriculum has more

coherence and takes better account of the pupils' own experiences and individual needs. Thematic approaches which have cross-curricular links are developing well. The teaching of music and dance is very good and the pupils respond well to the opportunities to participate; most get a lot of enjoyment out of these experiences.

The use of assessment data and the tracking of the pupils' progress have improved. Some teachers have a very good understanding of how to evaluate and assess the pupils' progress, while others have yet to become secure in this. The role of the teaching assistants in formative assessment is underdeveloped.

There have been positive moves by the LEA to secure an appropriate new site for the school which will accommodate all three key stages. As a result of overcrowding at the main school site, some of the Key Stage 4 pupils have moved to the post-16 site. Although in the long term this is not acceptable, it is a pragmatic short-term arrangement. In the meantime, the current post-16 site has been refurbished to provide a good facility for teaching life skills, an improved design and technology room and a computer suite. The hydrotherapy pool has also been refurbished and is providing the pupils with good opportunities for movement and exercise; this is a significant improvement to the facilities and is much enjoyed by the pupils.

Good links with a local mainstream secondary school and reasonable links with other local special schools has supported staff training on teaching physical education and enabled some pupils to use the good facilities of that school. Links with two other special schools are established. There is effective liaison with the parents and carers; this has helped in generating a positive ethos in the school. The parents are contacted frequently both to hear of the success of their children and to be made aware of any concerns.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides very good leadership and management and clear educational direction. Under her leadership, the staff work hard together as a cohesive team. The school runs smoothly and efficiently, policies and procedures are being developed systematically and routines are well established. The headteacher commands the respect of the staff and the pupils. She is continuing to foster the development of the staff team and has suitably high expectations of them. A robust programme of continuing professional development has been established and staff are encouraged and expected to share good practice and learn from one another. The management skills of the headteacher are very good and have improved significantly over the last two years. Most systems to support the improvement of the school are established, and are monitored and evaluated effectively. The school has recently appointed a permanent assistant headteacher. Suitable arrangements have been made for the secondment of a member of staff as a temporary second assistant headteacher with effect from the beginning of the current term. As a result, the team is not yet at full strength and too many of the management tasks fall to the headteacher; this is unacceptable in the longer term. The LEA recognises this and is providing effective regular support from the associate adviser. The establishment of a permanent management team with complementary skills continues to be a priority.

The headteacher has updated the school's improvement plan in line with developments since she was appointed, which was shortly after the school became subject to special measures. The plan provides a very good steer for the further improvement of the quality of education at the school. The co-ordination of mathematics and science is reasonable; the co-ordination of English and ICT is not yet established.

The governors have a better understanding of their role in school improvement and continue to be supportive. They have developed their understanding of the need to hold the school to account. They have been helpful in supporting the need for improved accommodation. Several members of the governing body have been influential in leading improvements, for example, to refurbish the swimming pool and develop the provision for ICT.

The school has had good support from some LEA services. The associate adviser has played an important part in securing and improving provision at the school. She has worked effectively with the headteacher to develop her management role in steering improvements in teaching and learning. This support has been valued by the headteacher. The adviser has also continued to work very effectively with the staff to improve their lesson planning and delivery.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The Michael Tippett School was inspected in January 2003 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in July and November 2003 and in February, May and October 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of January 2003.

In April 2005, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Nine lessons or parts of lessons, an end-of-school transfer, two tutorial sessions, an early communication skills session, a hydrotherapy session and a lunchtime PSHE+C session were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the acting assistant headteacher, the vice-chair of the governing body and two representatives of the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of January 2003 and the action plan prepared by the LEA to address those key issues.

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