



Peterhouse School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 133748
LEA Sefton
Inspection number 282365
Inspection dates 15 November 2005 to 15 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs Frances Gander CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Preston New Road
School category	Non-maintained special		Southport
Age range of pupils	5 to 19		Merseyside PR9 8PA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01704 506682
Number on roll	48	Fax number	01704 506683
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs B Matthews
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr Graham Birtwell

Age group 5 to 19	Inspection dates 15 November 2005 - 15 November 2005	Inspection number 282365
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Peterhouse School is a non-maintained special school for boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 19. The school does not currently have a Foundation Stage. It is administered by the charity Autism Initiatives. It has 48 places and is currently full. All pupils have Autism or Asperger's Syndrome. As such, they may have challenging behaviour, severe communication difficulties and/or learning difficulties. For most pupils their attainment on entry to the school is well below that expected for pupils of similar ages. However, occasionally pupils have exceptional talent in art, music or mathematics.

Autism Initiatives also provides full or part-time residential care for the pupils at three care homes. A third of the pupils are residential at these establishments. All pupils have all been placed by their local authorities and the school currently maintains links with 15 different ones. The Trustees appointed a new headteacher in 2003. The school is also inspected by other partners, such as local authorities and the National Autistic Society Accreditation Review.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding educational provision. It is highly effective in meeting the complex and sometimes challenging needs of all its pupils. The extensive assessment, the expertise of the staff, high quality teamwork, and the very positive ethos of the school are underlying strengths. As a result, pupils make very significant gains in their communication, personal development and academic progress. All parents felt that the school was providing outstanding educational provision and one stated that the 'school's individualised learning programmes makes every child matter'.

A rigorous audit of the provision has informed the school's self-evaluation. In a very short time many improvements in priority areas have been made. The school was initially reluctant to judge itself as outstanding, but was aware that some of its provision was exemplary practice. This had been identified by the Autism Accreditation Review carried out in November 2004. The areas for improvement from the last inspection have been achieved, and the school has continued to improve at a very fast rate. The high standards set by the new management team, the clear vision for the future, and the rapid rate of improvement shows that the school has the capacity and enthusiasm to improve. The fees charged for this type of school are not excessively high and considering the very high quality provision, the school is judged as offering excellent value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the provision for pupils in Years 12 to 14 is good. It has the potential to become outstanding as it is developing and improving. The school was accurate in its judgement. Improvement has been considerable. Students are now taught separately from the rest of the school in their own area. This has a more adult feel to it. The curriculum is well designed to prepare students well for the transition to adult services. They have access to a variety of courses, all at an individual level, which enables them to gain qualifications. There is a strong emphasis on helping students to acquire the skills necessary for adult life. Lessons are delivered in a way that recognises them as emerging adults and the students respond very positively to this. Students' behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning are as outstanding as they are in the rest of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue developing and extending the range of educational experiences for students over the age of 16.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school based its self-evaluation of achievement on the gains pupils made against measurable targets or against assessment. It did not take into consideration the all-round achievement pupils make in behaviour, overcoming anxieties, personal development, and in specific subjects, such as art or music. There is no evidence of underachievement of pupils in different groups. Considering all these aspects, pupils' achievements are better than the school judged and are outstanding.

Pupils, as they reduce their anxieties, learn the routines of school and begin to communicate their needs. They make excellent progress in all subjects. Year-on-year from a very low starting level, they make measurable gains against the nationally accepted performance levels in English, mathematics and personal development. This is because the pupils are provided with a curriculum which meets their needs and different learning abilities, and because of the very high quality teaching and assessment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Once again the school in its self-evaluation was over cautious in its judgement. This aspect is outstanding. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and this view is held by parents. When instances of unacceptable behaviour occur it is the result of the pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It is managed in a very consistent way by all staff so that pupils do not harm themselves or others. Pupils are aware, within their limitations, of how their behaviour may have a consequence on others.

Pupils enjoy attending school, and are enthusiastic about their experiences and opportunities presented to them. This is the unanimous view of the parents. The pupils are helped to adopt safe practices and healthy lifestyles, and have excellent meals at lunchtime. These are eaten in class groups, with pupils taking responsibility for setting and clearing the tables, as well as making choices. The lunches have a real family atmosphere to them. Attendance is very good and is higher than the average for this type of school.

The school successfully supports the personal development of pupils at all levels through its emphasis on promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness of pupils. Extensive work is carried out promoting multicultural awareness through focus weeks where each class makes a study of the cultures and beliefs of a specific country.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school judges teaching and learning to be outstanding for pupils in Years 1 to 11. The inspectors agree with this judgement. All staff know the pupils very well and match work exactly to their individual needs. Teachers make very good use of the highly detailed and accurate assessment information. This is used very effectively to set targets which are challenging but realistic. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and staff are expert at reducing pupils' anxiety levels as much as possible. Consequently, pupils enjoy lessons and make strong progress in learning new skills. Pupils make excellent progress in lessons because of these factors.

Teachers and support staff are highly skilled at using symbols, pictures and signing to promote pupils' communication and social interaction skills. Consequently, pupils' progress in learning to communicate and socialise is outstanding. All staff and therapists work extremely effectively together in 'seamless teams'; this maximises every learning opportunity and ensures all pupils are fully included in lessons. The teaching of personal and social skills is particularly strong. This is a focus of all lessons, and staff employ a wide range of strategies that support the learning of pupils. A very good focus is placed on giving pupils just the right level of support so that they learn to work as independently as possible.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school judges the curriculum to be outstanding and the inspectors agree. The curriculum is planned expertly to give pupils a variety of broad and rich experiences, whilst at the same time addressing the needs arising from their Autism or Asperger's Syndrome. Consequently, activities and strategies to promote communication are woven throughout the school day and staff are expert at implementing them. There is also a strong and very effective focus on supporting pupils' personal and social development. Pupils have many, very good, supported opportunities to learn how to interact successfully with others. The most recent Autism Accreditation Report in November 2004 commended the school for its 'thinking skills curriculum' which helps the pupils to think more flexibly and manage change. The curriculum is innovative. For example, a highly creative 'Expressive Arts' Department has been developed which incorporates relevant areas, such as music, art, and sensory skills.

There are good opportunities for pupils to engage in activities in the local community. They are proud of exhibiting their artwork, and the many positive comments made in the visitors' book by members of the public demonstrate strong community links. Pupils are involved in a variety of sporting activities, such as the Merseyside Schools

Athletics Championship. This helps them to learn to enjoy sport and promotes a healthy lifestyle. The very strong links between the school and the residences extend pupils' opportunities for learning. Staff are consistent in their teaching approaches and pupils have access to a range of education activities after the school day has finished.

Pupils are able to gain a range of qualifications and the school tries hard to provide suitable accredited courses which are at the right level for individuals.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school judges care, guidance and support to be outstanding. The inspectors agree with this judgement. All procedures for child protection and health and safety routines are fully in place. Extremely thorough and detailed risk assessments are conducted to ensure pupils' well-being and safety both in the school and when they go out into the community. All pupils have key staff to whom they can turn if they have a problem. There is an active school council which promotes the views of the pupils well. The school tries hard to involve pupils in monitoring their own progress by, for example, involving them thoroughly in their annual reviews.

The strategies which have been developed to help new pupils to settle and to support leavers are exemplary. There are very strong links with the Connexions Service and other agencies which support and guide pupils very well. Consequently, pupils make a positive start at school and move on successfully into adult services.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The inspectors found that the management had been too cautious when judging this as good. Inspectors found it to be outstanding. With the appointment of a new headteacher a complete audit of the strengths and weaknesses of the school has taken place, which was firmly based on monitoring and evaluation at all levels and in all areas. This informed the staff, the Education Committee, and the Trustees of the priority areas for improvement, but also highlighted strengths on which the school could build. A new vision evolved centring on creating a very high quality learning and working environment. This is reflected in the very detailed school development plan. The management have also started to look beyond the three years, with a long-term goal of providing a specialist college facility for students with Autism.

Improvements, as well as maintenance, have formed the basis of the school development plan. It focuses appropriately on raising standards, improving the quality of teaching and learning, meeting the different needs of pupils, improving the working conditions of staff and the learning environment. Many of these improvements have been completed ahead of the planned completion date. As part of its overall self-evaluation, the views of pupils and from parents, of whom it has historically had very strong supportive links with, are gathered. All parents indicated in the questionnaires that they thought the school was outstanding and provided many examples and reasons. One of the many examples stated:

'the staff really understand Autistic children and help us greatly by trying to educate them in all ways. I have every faith that Peterhouse School will help us give our daughter the best possible start in life despite her huge disadvantages'.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, we recently visited to find out about your school, what you did and how well your teachers were at helping you with your learning.

We would like to thank you all for being friendly, polite, well behaved, and for some of you to be willing to talk to us. It was very useful to know what you enjoyed.

You attend an excellent school. Here is a list of all the things that impressed us about your school.

- How well your headteacher and teachers know you, so that you are well cared for at school.
- How much you achieve in communication, personal development and academic subjects.
- How well you are taught and supported.
- How attractive the school is and how well you look after it.
- How much you enjoy the lessons and activities the teachers plan for you.
- How hard you try to get on well with everyone and do as you are asked.

This is what we have asked your school to do now, to make it even better.

- Continue developing the Post-16 department.

We hope you carry on enjoying your time at school.