

Fox Hollies School and Performing Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103625
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	286709
Inspection date	19 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	68
6th form	22
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ray Bishop
Headteacher	Paul Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	29 March 2001
School address	Highbury Community Campus Queensbridge Road Moseley Birmingham B13 8QB
Telephone number	0121 4646566
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Fox Hollies School caters for pupils who have severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. There is a wide ethnic mix of pupils representing the diverse nature of the area the school serves. A small minority have English as an additional language and a small number of pupils are in public care. In 2004, the school relocated to new purpose-built accommodation on a shared campus with a comprehensive school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Fox Hollies School is an excellent school. The headteacher and senior management team provide clear, confident leadership and work very closely with parents, staff and pupils. This very effective teamwork is at the heart of the school's success and underpins the excellent leadership and management. The school is continually looking at ways it can improve, and self-review is given a high priority. Very good use is made of the information the school has on pupils' progress to ensure that they do as well as they can. The progress of different groups of pupils within the school has been carefully considered. For example, this has led the school to improve provision for pupils on the autistic spectrum by ensuring they have enough support to enable them to achieve as well as their peers. The school has a very good understanding of its strengths and areas for development and has excellent capacity to improve.

Despite the fact that standards are exceptionally low because of pupils' special needs, pupils' achievements are outstanding across the school and in post-16. This is because pupils benefit from excellent teaching. Teachers' planning is meticulous and they know their pupils well. This ensures the full range of learning needs is met in lessons. Teachers use their creativity very well to make learning stimulating and interesting for pupils. Procedures to assess pupils' small steps of progress have recently been introduced, but the setting of challenging and accurate targets is not yet fully embedded and consistent throughout the school. Care, support and guidance offered to pupils is excellent and the exceptional relationships between staff and pupils are an important factor in pupils feeling safe and confident.

The curriculum is outstanding and contributes greatly to pupils' excellent personal development. The dynamic use of many aspects of the performing arts adds a great deal of enjoyment to pupils' learning. The wealth of activities such as ballet, dance and sports opportunities help to promote pupils' healthier lifestyles. The curriculum is extremely well supported by the school's excellent facilities. The very attractive learning environment is very conducive to promoting pupils' learning and outstanding personal development. The performing arts specialism also has a very positive impact on pupils' personal development. One parent commented, 'I see a confidence and a maturity in my daughter that I never thought I'd see.' The school has a strong commitment to including pupils into mainstream lessons where appropriate and works very closely with other schools and colleges to provide suitable experiences, so that pupils and students develop their maturity and independence skills extremely well.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form students achieve outstandingly well. The provision is distinctive, with students having their own uniform and common room. The sixth form is very well led and managed and this has ensured the curriculum is very suitable for the wide range of learning needs of students and it prepares them exceptionally well for the future. Courses focus on promoting students' personal development, independence and life skills. The range of vocational courses on offer in the school or at local colleges is excellent. All students, irrespective of their ability, experience success in a breadth of accredited courses. Students have good work-related opportunities to learn about the world of work and this is enhanced by a wide range of visits, for example to the Symphony Hall to see how concerts are staged.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of assessment of pupils' progress across the school, so that target setting is more accurate.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards are exceptionally low, due to the nature of pupils' learning difficulties. Following a slight dip in pupils' progress in 2005, due in part to disruptions in staffing, some pupils' progress was uneven in English and mathematics, although strong in science. However, progress is improving strongly and is now excellent. For example, in 2006, nearly all pupils met their predicted targets and some made excellent progress by exceeding their targets. The progress pupils make in developing their speaking, communication, listening and independence skills is extremely good. This reflects the improved provision for language and communication.

Targets are set for performing arts, including music, dance and drama and pupils achieve these very well. The school has started to make cautious use of national assessment information, as well as its own data, to compare how well different groups of pupils achieve, when compared to similar pupils across the country. This has allowed the school to check that no pupils are disadvantaged and that all can achieve equally well, irrespective of their disability.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils are very enthusiastic learners and are eager to participate in lessons and delight in the performing arts. This has an outstanding impact in developing their self-esteem and sense of achievement. For example, some pupils have formed the 'Freefall Dance Company' in association with the Birmingham Royal Ballet. Many pupils are confident to speak and perform in front of sizeable audiences in theatres, schools and concerts.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted extremely well. They experience a sense of wonder in many aspects of their work. One pupil was transfixed by the sound of a professional musician playing the violin and was fascinated by touching and feeling the instrument. Pupils respond very well to high expectations and their behaviour and attitudes to learning are extremely positive. Members of the school council are very effective representatives for their peers and ensure their views are heard. For example, as a result of their suggestions, improvements have been made to playground provision.

Most pupils are developing a very good understanding of the importance of living healthy lives and many participate in the schools extensive out-of-hours clubs, such as ballet, drama or music. Half of the pupils participate in the weekly Saturday club, which provides musical and sporting activities. Pupils develop excellent skills for the future through the very wide range of opportunities provided through the work-related learning programme, excellent links with the community and vocational courses.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching has a number of excellent features, enabling pupils to make excellent progress. The use of alternative methods of communication, including Makaton and the picture exchange communication systems (PECS), are outstanding. This greatly enhances pupils' learning opportunities in lessons. Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent, giving confidence and security to pupils, enabling them to actively participate in lessons. The performing arts are used exceptionally well to make teaching creative. For example, teachers use 'scene setting' techniques, such as using music that is associated with a particular subject. This helps to prepare pupils for the lesson so that they are fully engaged in learning. Teachers take account of pupils' preferred learning styles, and this ensures their attention is captivated and motivation is maintained. Support staff are exceptionally well deployed so that the wide range of needs of pupils in each class are fully addressed. Learning objectives are routinely shared at the start of lessons, and plenary sessions are used very effectively to re-cap these learning points. However, sometimes teachers do not always use the information they have on pupils' progress to ensure that targets are challenging enough for all pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The excellent curriculum does much to promote pupils' good achievement and excellent personal development. It meets the diverse range of needs of all pupils exceptionally well. The focus on personal and social development, improving communication and projects such as an annual industry week, prepare pupils very effectively for the future. The imaginative use of the performing arts greatly enhances the provision, adding creativity, stimulation and excitement to pupils' learning. For example, as part of the performing arts initiative, a group of pupils led a dance workshop in the Reception class of a local primary school. These opportunities support the development of their social and independence skills exceptionally well. The extensive opportunities for visits, sporting, musical, dance and drama activities enrich the curriculum extremely well. The range of accredited courses available to pupils of all abilities is excellent. Pupils have numerous opportunities to work in mainstream settings or in colleges alongside their peers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The very strong emphasis on care and support for individuals and practical commitment of staff ensuring the health, safety and well-being of pupils is excellent. Outstanding relationships between staff and pupils underpin this excellent care. One pupil summed up his feelings, saying 'Staff are fab'. Partnerships nurtured with parents, carers and therapists are very strong and ensure that pupils maximise their learning by dealing with any problems. Parents, in conjunction with the school, are actively involved in setting individual objectives for their child. Every pupil

is viewed as a unique individual and their needs are carefully considered. For example, through careful planning, one pupil was able to attend the local mainstream school for weekly dance lessons. All pupils have individual personalised learning, behaviour, and positive characteristics clearly identified so that pupils' strengths can be built upon. Teachers use these well to plan lessons and to guide pupils' learning, and they are a significant factor in the success pupils achieve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher, together with the senior management team, work together very well and have established a clear and shared vision for the school's development. The headteacher regularly reviews all aspects of the school's provision, identifying areas for development to improve the school further. Whole-school assessment information has been analysed and used perceptively to bring about improvements. For example, following wide consultation with staff, parents and analysis of assessment data, language development and pupils' independence skills were highlighted as priority areas for improvement. This led to training for teachers and teaching assistants to lead more effective communication lessons and to sharper focused individual education plans for pupils. This has impacted very positively on pupils' progress in these areas as a result of these actions.

The headteacher and key staff have a passion for pupils in the school to experience maximum participation in all activities and to access inclusive lessons as much as possible. As a result, the school has extensive links with a wide range of school and colleges which increase the breadth of opportunities available for all pupils. This has led to the formation of a partnership, known as 'Leading Edge', with Queensbridge School and other local schools to promote the inclusion of pupils. The school has excellent links with a range of support services, which ensures the provision to support pupils' needs is excellent.

New teachers have been inducted effectively and comprehensive performance management systems ensure that staff receive extremely good training to develop their expertise still further. The governing body provides good support to the school. Governors have been actively involved in the self-evaluation of the school and have a clear picture of its strengths and areas for development

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Annex A

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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
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	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

We very much enjoyed our visit to your school recently. Thank you for making us feel welcome and for talking to us.

We were very impressed with your school and thought it was excellent. You get lots of opportunities to be involved with singing, drama, dance and sports. We thought the performing arts not only make learning enjoyable but also help to develop your independence and self-confidence very well. We can see why you like coming to school. Your headteacher and all the staff are doing a very good job and they make sure the school is friendly and that you all work hard. You rise well to this challenge and many of you are making good progress. We thought the post-16 students do exceptionally well, because of the range of courses and experiences they receive. Your teachers are very creative and they make sure that learning is interesting and fun. All the staff make sure you are safe and well looked after and many of you said how much you like them, and they help you to grow and mature very well.

To make the school even better, we have suggested just one thing. The school should check more closely how well everyone does in the school, so that the targets you are set are just right for you.