



Pens Meadow School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103883
Local Authority Dudley
Inspection number 286797
Inspection date 12 December 2006
Reporting inspector Alan Dobbins

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Type of school | Special | School address | Ridge Hill |
| School category | Foundation | | Brierley Hill Road, Wordsley |
| Age range of pupils | 3–19 | | Stourbridge DY8 5ST |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01384 818945 |
| Number on roll (school) | 58 | Fax number | 01384 818946 |
| Number on roll (6th form) | 13 | | |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Ivan Dalloway |
| | | Headteacher | Grahame Robertson |
| Date of previous school inspection | 19 March 2001 | | |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school provides for pupils with severe, and profound and multiple learning difficulties, although an increasing number have complex difficulties associated with autism. The school serves the Borough of Dudley and is located in leased accommodation on a campus belonging to the local National Health Service Primary Care Trust. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. A small number are from minority ethnic groups and a high proportion are eligible for free school meals. Both headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Pens Meadow School is a good and improving school. Effective leadership by the headteacher, who is supported exceedingly well by the deputy headteacher, helps pupils make increasingly good progress. The good curriculum is becoming more cohesive and is providing pupils with a greater range of learning experiences than previously. Pupils are happy and comfortable at school because of the outstanding levels of care and support offered by all staff and they make good strides toward becoming as independent as possible, although restrictions in the accommodation limit sixth formers' development in this respect. Nevertheless, personal development overall is good. Despite the fragile health of many pupils, attendance is good and, after account is taken of the difficulties some pupils have in always controlling their behaviour, behaviour in lessons and throughout the school is good. Parents and carers are very pleased with all aspects of the school because they know it is improving and that their children like going to school and are flourishing as learners and as young people.

Although standards are well below average because of pupils' difficulties with learning, achievement is good. Pupils in the Foundation Stage make a good start. Those in Years 1 to 9 make equivalently good progress in most of the subjects. Progress is similarly good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Pupils are prepared well for life after school. Teaching is good. Teachers and the teaching assistants are skilled at using specialist strategies to promote learning and in communicating with pupils in different ways. Planning is good in most of the lessons and, as a result, pupils learn what is right for them and, most often, work as hard as they can to meet the challenges set for them. In some subjects, assessment data is not used well enough to help plan lessons.

Leadership and management are good. The senior leaders make a strong team in securing improvement and are supported well by middle managers and the governors. They have high expectations for the future of the school and the capacity to achieve these. They are beginning to use data well to focus on individual achievement but not well enough, yet, in judging the progress of different groups of pupils or the overall effectiveness of the school. They have met fully all of the key issues identified at the last inspection, except those to do with some parts of the accommodation, including the need to improve some specialist facilities and the toilets and to increase storage space.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form makes good provision for the students. They achieve well both academically and personally because of good leadership and management and good teaching over a curriculum that fits very well with their needs. The excellent care, support and guidance and the effective links with colleges, Connexions and other agencies, as well as the regular use of community facilities, ensures that students are prepared well for life after school. This is despite inadequate accommodation. Teaching takes place in rooms that are too small and the lack of a place to develop and practise

independence skills limits the progress pupils make in this important part of their personal development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more effective use of assessment information to inform lesson planning, especially in the foundation subjects, and in showing where achievement and provision should be improved.
- Improve the accommodation to enhance teaching and learning and to ensure that pupils' dignity is preserved.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Parents and carers are delighted with the progress their children make. One said that her son 'loves the school and this is why he is doing so well'. Another said that her child 'has made outstanding progress since joining the school'.

Standards are well below average but achievement is good. Detailed records in English, mathematics, science and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) compiled over this last year show that pupils make good progress against their targets, and their rate of progress compares favourably with emerging national data for equivalent pupils. Pupils are prepared well in the Foundation Stage for their work at Year 1, as is shown by the good progress they make against each of the early learning goals. They leave Year 11 equivalently well prepared for their work in the sixth form. The good progress pupils in Years 10 and 11 make is seen in their successes on units of the Accreditation for Life and Living (ALL) qualification. Last year, all those who left Year 11 gained at least one unit and most gained three units. Similarly, the good progress of sixth formers is seen in the good results they achieve over an appropriate range of nationally accredited awards. There is no evidence that any group of pupils, for example pupils with the most complex needs or those who have the highest capability, makes better progress than any other group. In science and physical education, the lack of appropriate specialist facilities means that pupils do not gain a full experience of these subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Throughout their time at school, pupils make good progress in their personal development, including improving their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Opportunities to sit in a circle and think about their learning or their feelings and to listen to music provide good support for promoting spiritual awareness. With very good support, pupils learn how to handle equipment safely. They are aware of the need to maintain healthy lifestyles and the importance of staying fit. Some do not

choose healthy options at lunchtime, but all delight in their trampoline and hydrotherapy sessions. Behaviour is good and pupils respond well to the school's excellent strategies to support them. Some find changes in routines difficult to cope with, but they gradually learn to modify and improve their behaviours and they make good progress in their moral and social skills. The school has good relationships with many local businesses and this allows pupils to develop well personally and socially from being involved in community life. Parents say that the school helps their children become 'patient, calm and willing to learn'. All pupils clearly enjoy school because the school is a sea of happy smiling faces.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The very well moderated programme of lesson observations shows, over this last year, teaching to be good and getting better. In part, it is getting better because class groupings have been changed to reflect the learning needs of pupils, and not primarily their age. This means that the specialist skills of teachers and their assistants, for example in using strategies such as the Treatment and Education of Communicationally Challenged Children (TEACCH), are matching better with pupils' requirements for learning, and teaching and learning are becoming more effective.

In all the classrooms, staff know their pupils well and make good use of signs, symbols and pictures, and sometimes electronic switches and other equipment, to have pupils understand what they need to do to complete their tasks. In many classrooms, interactive whiteboards are used well in making learning more interesting, through the use of sound, colour and movement. Good planning especially in certain subjects results in pupils learning what is right for them. This is achieved more regularly in English, mathematics, science and PSHE because assessment in these subjects provides precise information on what pupils know, understand and can do. Assessment in other subjects lacks this precision, making it less effective in helping plan lessons that meet pupils' needs.

Pupils show they are comfortable as learners through their good behaviour and by working hard to do their best. In some lessons they may be troubled and in others they can be very tired because of their fragile health, but staff are expert at dealing with changing situations and in most lessons, whatever the reaction of pupils, learning proceeds as planned.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum has developed well over the last few years. Children in the Foundation Stage are served well because their learning experiences are tailored to match with their individual needs. The curriculum for pupils in Years 1 to 11 broadly meets national requirements and focuses, appropriately, on making pupils as independent as possible, although because of the absence of some specialist facilities, pupils do not have as full an experience of science and physical education as they should. The extent of pupils' learning over their time at school is reflected well in a good range of appropriate accredited awards that they take in Years 10 and 11, and in the sixth form.

An outstanding feature of the curriculum is the very wide range of enrichment opportunities such as the after-school club; the joint ventures with pupils from other schools, for example at Christmas time; the regular visits to local facilities; the regular visits to places in the locality; and, especially, by the twice yearly opportunities to go away on a very good range of different residential visits. Each of these provides important opportunities to develop pupils' emerging social skills, to practise the skills of independence and to support classroom learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The provision for safeguarding pupils' health and safety is a truly outstanding feature of the care, guidance and support provided. All aspects of care are treated very seriously. Routines, for example those to do with administering medicines, are strictly regulated and very rigorous. Risk assessments are carried out regularly and child protection procedures are robust and known by all staff. Regular training sessions ensure that all staff are very well briefed on moving and handling pupils, managing challenging behaviours and, occasionally, in keeping pupils safe from hurting themselves and others. Over the last year, the number of behaviour incidents has reduced dramatically because the provision for looking after the pupils has improved. Pupils are extremely well cared for and are safe in lessons and throughout the school. Given the fragile health and vulnerability of many pupils, this is a very significant strength of the school.

Recent changes to the way that staff check on the pupils' personal development and their learning in English, mathematics, science and PSHE mean that staff plan activities that, most of the time, meet pupils' needs well. Targets are used well in supporting learning and in the development of personal skills, such as those to do with eating and toileting. Links with other professionals, including medical staff and speech therapists, are very well established. They provide good help in developing pupils' personal and social skills, especially in helping those with the most complex needs improve their communication skills so that they gain equivalent access to their learning as do the others. Provision for careers education is good and means that the pupils,

parents and carers benefit from valuable guidance about what choices to make when pupils are ready to leave.

The procedures for toileting pupils are good, but the toilets themselves are too small to always ensure that pupils' dignity is secured. The paucity of storage space around the school means that equipment, including mobility aids, is left in walkways. Not only does this clutter up the walkways, but it limits the effectiveness of the work of therapists and other visitors to the school because they have no place to leave equipment that could be beneficially used when they are not there.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher and the deputy headteacher make a strong team who are guiding improvement well. The school has accurately identified areas for improvement and, with the increasing involvement of middle managers, is taking effective action. These developments include embedding good procedures for planning the curriculum that realise closer links with lesson planning; restructuring class groupings so that the specialist skills of staff match better with pupils' learning needs; and extending the skills and experience of staff by substantially increasing their training opportunities. Through the precise and regular monitoring of the work of all staff, they have set high expectations and these, and other developments, have made clear contributions to raising achievement, enhancing personal development and to securing the outstanding level of care provided to each pupil. Day to day, the school is a calm, organised and happy place that is enjoyed by pupils and staff alike and where all are able to prosper.

The new system for assessing progress is used well in providing a strong focus on individual achievement in the core subjects. But as yet there is not a big enough pool of information to persuasively show the relative progress of different groups of pupils. Senior leaders recognise this and have plans to change this and to make better use of their growing database in judging the overall effectiveness of the school.

Governors meet their remit to the school and provide good support to the headteacher. They form a strong team with the senior leaders and, collectively, there is a good capacity for continuing to develop the school.

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Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 | |
| The attendance of learners | 2 | |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 | |
| 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 | 2 | |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 | 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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 | |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 2 | |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 | |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 | |
| 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 time with you and would like to thank you for helping us find out about your school. We were impressed with your school and think that it provides you with a good education overall, and the way you are looked after and cared for is outstanding. We especially like that, but we also like:

- the good progress you make in your learning and in the way you develop as young people
- the way the headteacher and the other senior leaders make the school a happy place to be because it is organised well and everyone, that is, the staff and yourselves, are expected to work as hard as they can
- the good teaching you receive which often makes learning fun and makes you want to do your best. We know this because we saw you laugh a lot in lessons and saw you working hard even when we knew you were tired
- that what you learn is right for you and that you go away to stay at places where you do exciting things that are new to you.

There are two things we would like improved:

- we would like the senior leaders to make better use of the information they gain on how well you are doing so they can judge for themselves how good the school is.
- we would like the building to be better so that you do not have to feel crowded in any part of the school, including the toilets, and so that you could be taught more things in science and in physical education.

We hope that you have a good Christmas, and please keep working as hard as you can.