

Palmerston School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104748
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	287020
Inspection dates	20–21 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Eric Craven HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	84
6th form	43
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Carol Chapman
Headteacher	Lis Burbage
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2002
School address	Beaconsfield Road Woolton Liverpool Merseyside L25 6EE
Telephone number	0151 4282128
Fax number	0151 4210985

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Palmerston School provides for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some pupils have additional needs such as sensory impairment and challenging behaviour. Most join the school in Year 7 although a few pupils are admitted at other times during Key Stages 3 and 4 and at age 16. Pupils come from all parts of the city of Liverpool. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage with around 10% from minority ethnic backgrounds. About two thirds of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and approximately one in ten is a looked-after child.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Its work is consistently good and significant aspects are excellent. All parents and carers who returned the questionnaire felt their children were happy at the school and the great majority recognised the good progress they were making. There were a very small number who felt they did not know enough about their children's progress. One parent summed up the general view by saying, 'My daughter has attended Palmerston since September 2006 and has made lots of new friends and is very happy. She loves going to school and has made lots of progress in every subject.' The pupils' achievements are good and for some pupils they are outstanding. All pupils leave the school with externally recognised awards and a few achieve very well by gaining national accreditation at Entry Level 2, which is roughly equivalent to National Curriculum Level 2. The pupils make first rate progress because teachers assess their needs well and plan work that is most often carefully matched to their abilities. Nevertheless, in a few lessons, the work provided for more able pupils could be more challenging and they could make even more progress. Teaching is good overall and some of it is exceptional. Teaching and support staff work very effectively together. Lessons are often practical in nature and made relevant to the pupils. Information and communication technology is used well to add interest and excitement to lessons.

The curriculum is carefully designed to ensure it meets the pupils' needs and interests. Particular curriculum packages are put together for those who need the most significant adjustments. The school makes very good use of local resources in the community, including links with other schools, to enhance the curriculum. The pupils' personal and social development is outstanding. This is because the school focuses on the whole child and on pupils becoming as independent as possible. Many pupils have a good awareness of healthy living and keeping safe. They thoroughly enjoy their time at the school and as a consequence their attendance is good. The arrangements for the care and guidance of pupils are first rate. Safeguarding procedures are very robust and pupils say they feel safe and know who to go to if they have any worries. Relationships are very good and staff are fine role models as they show pupils respect and are consistently polite and courteous. Pupils receive good guidance and support from the school and other agencies at points of transition.

The school achieves as well as it does because of the outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher and other senior managers. There is a clear vision for the school and its very robust self-evaluation procedures mean that it knows itself well. Subject leaders are effective in monitoring the work of their subjects. They provide good guidance and support for their colleagues. Some non-teaching staff helpfully have posts as learning support officers with specific responsibilities for aspects of the school's work. The school uses data on the academic progress of pupils effectively, which puts it in a strong position to respond to the patterns and trends this highlights. Measures of the pupils' personal and social development are generally analysed on an individual pupil basis. However, more use could be made of this data at a whole school level. The governing body is discharging its responsibilities effectively. There is a mix of experienced and new governors and they are well informed and in a position to act as a critical friend to the school.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The post-16 department is led and managed extremely well. There is a clear understanding of the purpose of the department, which is suitably distinct from the rest of the school. There is increasing focus on the development of life skills, independence and choice. Adult oriented activities are prominent, for example some pupils contribute to the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme for younger pupils by sharing their own experiences of adolescence with them. The progress made by many pupils is excellent. The curriculum is a suitable mix of life skills, world studies and vocational experiences. All pupils have opportunities for residential trips to practise their life skills, and excellent use is made of the strong links with other schools to further the curriculum offer to the pupils. A few pupils from mainstream schools attend Palmerston for some of their studies as the curriculum is particularly well matched to their needs. All of the pupils leave the school with externally validated qualifications.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the more able pupils are suitably challenged in all lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Because of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities the standards achieved by the pupils are well below those of pupils of a similar age nationally. However, the progress they make and their achievements are good overall and in many cases outstanding. There are good examples of pupils moving from low starting points to achieve very well in national Entry Level courses. The data held by the school shows that many do better than similar pupils in other special schools, notably in their mathematics work. In analysing its data the school identified writing as a relative weakness and put in place actions to deal with this. Subsequent assessments show that this has been very successful and the pupils have made good progress. Analysis of the 2006 data shows that the majority of the pupils achieved their challenging targets and some exceeded them. There is no discernible difference in the progress being made by different groups of pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils have a good awareness of healthy living that has been fostered through the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. The school has achieved the National Healthy School's standard. Pupils enjoy and benefit from the plentiful array of physical activities they undertake. The school council makes a positive difference. It is supported well by staff to ensure its work is meaningful. For example, the council consider weekly nominations of pupils for 'citizenship of the week' awards. All of the pupils are encouraged to participate in activities that contribute to the work of the school and wider afield. A vote by the entire school determined the colour of the school uniform. Fundraising events are commonplace and help the pupils appreciate the difficulties faced by others around the world. Their social and moral development is as good as it is because of the effective work the school does in developing

these skills through the PSHE programme, behaviour management procedures and through staff's daily interactions with the pupils. The spiritual and cultural development of the pupils is excellent. Pupils understand about different faiths and cultures and their lessons are enhanced by visits and visitors and through specific projects such as the African Arts Day and a Fairtrade project. The development of economic awareness is extremely good because of the school's emphasis on life skills and vocational education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is judged to be good overall and some of it is outstanding. All teaching is well planned to an agreed format. Assessment of pupils' progress is frequent and the accuracy of the assessments is assured through checks on these in collaboration with other special schools. There is liberal use of praise by staff which reinforces pupils' learning. The best teaching is characterised by a brisk pace to the lesson and changes of activity which maintain pupils' interest. The main feature which distinguishes outstanding teaching is the use of probing questions that check on pupils' learning. The headteacher encourages staff to be innovative and creative in their lessons and to take risks. Staff learn from their mistakes and the school's records show that the quality of teaching is improving.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is particularly well designed to meet the pupils' needs. It is broad and balanced and flexible enough to be tailored to the individual requirements of pupils. Work-related learning is made meaningful for pupils in accordance with their level of ability and understanding. All pupils undertake college taster courses. The school capitalises on its networks with other schools to extend the curriculum and some pupils undertake parts of their studies in mainstream schools, notably for Entry Level programmes of study. Extra-curricular activities are provided at lunchtimes and on two evenings a week. The curriculum is suitably enhanced by the frequent opportunities for pupils to practice their skills in the community and by visitors to the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care and guidance provided by the staff is of high quality. Pupils are well supervised and safeguarding matters are taken very seriously. The school has been prominent in a pilot programme to promote person centred reviews. These focus on the whole child rather than exclusively on their education. Evaluation of this work indicates its success in enabling more pupils to make meaningful contributions to their own annual reviews and parents say they too are more involved. Pupils have regular opportunities to discuss their individual targets with staff. The good use of celebrations and tangible rewards help pupils appreciate their achievements. Behaviour management procedures are robust and effective and all pupils who

require them have individual behaviour plans. Home-school communication in most cases is very good and has been enhanced by pupils contributing to their home-school diaries.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher has high expectations of staff and is holding them to account well. Staff are working effectively as a team and the school's rigorous evaluations and plans are informed by the views of stakeholders in the school. The school's aims have been reviewed and are now aligned closely to the five outcomes of the national agenda for 'Every Child Matters'. A review of the school's development plan is underway and this too is married to these important outcomes. Governors are helpfully linked to school development priorities so they can closely monitor the progress of the school in achieving its aims. The training that staff receive, and the good links with other schools, have made a sizeable contribution to the improvements evident since the last school inspection. Palmerston has made sustained progress and because of its excellent self-review and action planning practices, it has an excellent capacity to develop further.

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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	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
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	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?	2	2
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

Inspection of Palmerston School, Liverpool, L25 6EE

Many thanks for the warm welcome I received when I inspected your school. I am also very grateful to the members of the school council who met with me.

I have judged Palmerston to be an excellent school. You make first rate progress in your lessons because teachers plan well to meet your needs and teaching is most often fun and interesting. I did like the way the interactive whiteboards were being used and you all seemed to like them as well. You learn about many different things in school and the opportunities you have to visit the local community let you practise those skills that will help you become as independent as possible. The school does a lot to ensure you are safe and healthy and the pupils I spoke with told me they felt safe. Many of you are aware of the importance of healthy eating and good exercise.

The staff were all polite and respectful when they spoke to you and I think this is helping you behave well. I was pleased to see you learning about people from different cultures and different faiths. Your work in raising money for charities helps you understand about people in need of help. The pupils in the post-16 department are doing extremely well and the links the school has with other schools, the college and people who can provide work experience means that they are being prepared very well for life when they leave school. The things that make the school as good as it is happen because the school is very well led and managed by the headteacher and other senior staff. They are clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses and they have helped the school improve over the past few years.

Even the best schools can still improve further. I think some of you could do even better in lessons if teachers set even harder work for you to do. This is the one thing that I have asked Mrs Burbage and the governors to do to make the school even better than it is.

Please do keep trying to do your best in school.