

Courtlands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113647
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	289682
Inspection date	20 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Farrell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stuart Williams
Headteacher	Jon Dunkerley
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2001
School address	Widely Lane Crownhill Plymouth PL6 5JS
Telephone number	01752 776848
Fax number	01752 769102

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Courtlands School educates children who have moderate learning difficulties and increasingly, other needs, including emotional and behavioural and communication difficulties. The children live mainly in the inner city of Plymouth and over 60% of children have free school meals. Their attainment on entry to the school is significantly below national expectations and all pupils have statements of special educational need. There are many more boys than girls, very few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and six pupils in local authority care. The school ceased taking pupils aged 11 to 12 years in 2002, and its roll has fallen by almost half in the past 10 years leading to a restructuring of the curriculum and a reduction in the number of staff.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Courtlands is a satisfactory school with some strong features. Parents value the school highly, saying of staff, 'nothing is too much trouble', and this is reflected in the good procedures for the care and welfare of the pupils. Consequently, pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils really enjoy school and the opportunities they are given to take on responsibilities. This is because they benefit from a good curriculum, which provides a good range of activities enriched by popular lunchtime clubs and reflected in the high quality of displays and environments around school. Pupils develop a good understanding of staying safe and how to keep healthy. Although standards are below national expectations because of the special educational needs of the children, they make satisfactory progress. Younger pupils from reception age to Year 2 achieve well and make good progress because teaching is carefully matched to their needs and teachers interact with and involve pupils well. Older pupils progress satisfactorily because, although teaching is enthusiastic, it is not always sufficiently challenging. Consequently, although there is some good teaching in the school, the overall quality is satisfactory.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher, well supported by all staff, has given a strong lead to pastoral developments and in setting a caring and positive atmosphere. The school has a developing knowledge of how it is performing, enabling it to be accurate in its assessment of some areas of the school's work. However its evaluation of overall effectiveness was more positive than that of the inspection team. This is because the use of information to improve learning and to raise standards is not good enough to enable the school to rigorously track pupils' academic work. Whilst school improvement planning is satisfactory it does not always make clear what the outcomes of improvements will be because the targets and strategies are not specific enough. The school works well in partnership with others, has a satisfactory capacity to improve, and is strongly determined to make the necessary improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching for pupils in Years 3 to 6 to ensure it is more clearly focused on meeting the needs of pupils.
- Make more effective use of the information the school has on pupils' achievements to enable it to have a better understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.
- Improve school improvement planning so that targets and strategies can be evaluated more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

While pupils' standards are below national expectations because of their special educational needs, all, regardless of their special needs and backgrounds, make satisfactory progress. Younger pupils from reception age to Year 2 make a good start, achieving well and make good progress. They make particularly good progress in their communication skills. Older pupils' achievements are satisfactory because teaching is satisfactory. Pupils make satisfactory progress against appropriate targets and good progress in developing speaking and listening skills. Pupils achieve well in physical activities and enrichment activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy their lessons and show consideration for others. They attend regularly and participate actively in all the school offers. In their play and lunchtime clubs and as they move around school the children behave very well and are friendly and happy. The school places great emphasis on these aspects of development, for example reminding pupils of expectations and supporting them to resolve any disagreements or misunderstandings. Pupils know about healthy living, the importance of physical activities and are aware of healthy foods and act accordingly. The school council provides a good opportunity for pupils to develop leadership and representative skills. The valuable links with the local community and the good range of visits and visitors have helped the pupils to be confident with others and behave maturely. They have a good understanding of business skills, for example through selling the produce from their garden and this, together with their very good social skills, prepares them well for the challenges they will meet in the future. Pupils make a good contribution to the local community and to the school community, for example taking pride in helping lunchtime serving staff.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

While some teaching is good, the quality varies across the school. There are common strengths in teaching. In all classes teachers manage their pupils well and relationships are strong. Pupils say they 'really like their teachers', they think 'they are the best' and they would give them '3,000 thumbs up'. Teaching assistants provide good support and resources are used well to make tasks interesting. This is evident in Reception and Years 1 and 2, where good planning ensures that pupils delight in playing language games and learning to recognise initial sounds in words in a fun way. Activities for these pupils are based carefully on the different learning needs and abilities and this helps support good progress. For pupils in Years 3 to 6 however, teachers' expectations are not always as high and not enough is expected of the pupils. Occasionally pupils spend too long listening to the teachers and the pace of learning slows. Pupils themselves say they would like 'harder work' and 'more challenges'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has been adapted well to meet the changing needs of the pupils and the reduced number of staff. Younger children have a wide range of practical learning tasks and get off to a good start as a result. Older pupils too are provided with a wide range of activities. An extensive range of visits and visitors and specialist weeks, such as a recent art week, helps bring the curriculum to life and make learning enjoyable. Pupils talk eagerly, for example, about trips to a river to help their geography project and to local businesses in their World of Work project, which helps prepare pupils for life beyond Courtland's. Pupils say they 'love the gardening club' where they grow and sell plants to parents. These opportunities, together with many other additional clubs and a well planned personal, social and health education programme, give pupils a good awareness of how to keep safe and how to get along with each other. The school is developing the links with mainstream schools and they are beginning to share a range of social activities but it recognises that opportunities for pupils to share academic activities are not yet fully developed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Courtland's has a caring, supportive family atmosphere. Consequently, pupils feel safe and happy in school and learn to behave well. Parents are very happy with the level of care shown to their children, saying 'staff are kind and caring' and 'help children overcome many obstacles'. Child protection procedures are rigorous. Speech and language therapists, art and music therapists and others from outside agencies all play key roles in contributing to and improving pupils' communication and personal development. Support for personal development is good and pupils know their personal targets for learning and like collecting the stickers that let them know how well they are doing. They say they like discussing these with their teachers at the end of each week and choosing new ones. Academic guidance is satisfactory because pupils are not always as clear about the academic targets on their individual education plans because they are too numerous.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership team have successfully ensured that, throughout a period of considerable change, the welcoming atmosphere of the school, the good curriculum, care and personal development of children has been maintained. The resources, including the school building, are innovatively used to create a stimulating setting for learning.

The school's self-evaluation procedures are in place and this has led to accurate assessments of the curriculum and care, guidance and support, but the school is over generous in its evaluations of the effectiveness of other aspects of its work. This is because it is not making good enough use of the information it has on pupils' progress to ensure there is an effective understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. This has an impact on school improvement planning which, while it is broad, does not set precise enough whole school targets or strategies for improving. While there is now a broader leadership structure and coordinators are aware of their own subject standards, the analysis of whole school data is not detailed enough to ensure priorities are sufficiently precise.

Governors are supportive of the school particularly through this period of change but have not demanded precise enough information about the school's priorities and strategies for raising standards. The leadership team are keen to improve and remain unflagging in their commitment to the children and their parents.

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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
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

As you will remember, my colleague Julia Coop and I inspected your school on 20 March. It was lovely to meet you and I am writing now to thank you for helping us and for your valuable contribution to the inspection.

There were many positive things we found:

- You behave well and are polite and helpful.
- You enjoy school, are happy there and your parents value the support of staff.
- The school provides a good range of activities to help you learn, including very popular lunchtime clubs.
- The school looks after you and supports you well.

There are some things that the school can do better so I have asked the staff to:

- improve the quality of teaching for pupils in Years 3 to 6 to ensure it is more clearly focused on meeting pupils' needs
- use the information on how well you are doing more effectively to further improve teaching
- make the plan that helps the school to improve sharper so it is clearer what the school has to do.

Thank you again and the best of luck for your future.