



Montacute School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113959
Local Authority Poole
Inspection number 289768
Inspection date 28 February 2007
Reporting inspector Mike Kell

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

Type of school	Special	School address	3 Canford Heath Road
School category	Foundation special		Poole
Age range of pupils	5-19		BH17 9NG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01202 693239
Number on roll (school)	64	Fax number	01202 657363
Number on roll (6th form)	10		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Pam Henderson
		Headteacher	Marion Sammons
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Since September 2006, Montacute has been recognised as a Specialist Special School focusing on cognition and learning. The school is involved fully in many other national initiatives; and has National Healthy School accreditation. Within the local authority, Montacute leads a primary strategy learning network, with a focus on inclusion, in partnership with two middle and three first schools. The school's leaders also manage an outreach team that supports pupils with special educational needs in up to 12 mainstream schools. This team is part of the local authority's service for supporting inclusion and therefore its work did not feature in the inspection.

In addition to taking pupils from Poole, the school admits some from the adjoining local authorities of Dorset and Bournemouth. All the pupils have a statement of special educational need. In most cases this is for severe learning difficulties. Of the remainder, approximately equal numbers have profound and multiple learning difficulties or autism. There are many more boys than girls on roll. Virtually all the pupils have a White British background. A high proportion, almost a quarter, are eligible for free school meals. A small minority of the pupils are in public care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Montacute School is exceptional. The provision for post-16 students is equally impressive. One parent's comment that 'the staff seem to be able to think one step ahead' is very perceptive. Leadership and management are outstanding, with an immensely influential headteacher. The school strives for excellence in everything that it does, pursuing with vigour and enthusiasm new initiatives that will benefit its pupils. This approach has been instrumental in enabling it to develop excellent links with the many partners with which it works.

The pupils' standard of work is exceptionally low compared with national expectations, as a result of their learning difficulties. However, all of them, including post-16 students, make excellent progress from their starting points when they enter the school. They achieve so outstandingly well because the notion that every pupil is valued and equally important forms the basis of all the school's work. All pupils benefit from excellent teaching and an outstanding curriculum, irrespective of their age or the nature of their learning difficulties. Outstanding levels of care, guidance and support help pupils make excellent progress in their personal development, and put the pupils into the most favourable position to benefit from what the school has to offer. Consequently, their learning is of the highest quality.

A focus on promoting pupils' personal development is evident in all of the school's day-to-day work. It achieves this very successfully. Even though many of the pupils have acute medical conditions and others are especially vulnerable, they enjoy school so much that their attendance is exceptional. When in school, they are friendly and outgoing and their behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. They make great strides in their communication skills and social awareness and become increasingly confident about being in the community. Virtually all the pupils transfer to the post-16 department and by the time they leave school they show great maturity and the independence to help and look after themselves.

The senior leaders maintain an excellent balance between providing the highest possible levels of care and education for their pupils with planning for the future so that the school can remain at the forefront of practice. It fulfils its responsibilities as a specialist school and its role as the leader of a learning network extremely successfully. Consequently, many Montacute pupils benefit from the opportunities that they have to be included in lessons working alongside their mainstream peers. In addition, the school is able to offer much help and expertise to support staff and pupils in mainstream partner schools.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The students are lively, self-assured and sociable young people. A very strong staff team plans and works together successfully to meet their wide range of needs. Excellent teaching and an imaginative curriculum seek to develop the students' skills and support their initiative at every turn, encouraging them to be as independent as possible. Key

skills such as communication and literacy are reinforced daily and supported by practical activities like shopping for ingredients and cooking lunch. Consequently, the students make exceptionally good progress. Highly skilled staff use a variety of methods to help non-verbal students to communicate, thereby lessening their frustration and aiding their inclusion in activities. However, occasionally the resources are not suitably matched to the age and interests of the students.

The students' excellent personal development is enhanced considerably by realistic work experience within school or, in the case of more confident and capable students, in the community. The Team Enterprise company, Kann-Do 4 U, and excellent links with partner colleges support the students' work-related curriculum extremely well. They contribute immensely to the excellent way in which the students are prepared for the next stage of their lives, as do the students' outstanding achievements elsewhere. Many receive recognition of their work through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). They also show their ability to rise to the occasion and apply what they have achieved in other ways, such as achieving the Duke of Edinburgh Award (Silver and Bronze).

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that post-16 students are always given learning resources that acknowledge their age and interests.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The nature of the pupils' learning difficulties means that the standard of their work is exceptionally low compared with the national average. However, they make excellent progress in acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding throughout their time in school. This is the case for all the pupils. No groups, such as looked after children or those with a particular type of learning difficulty, achieve less well than their classmates. This is because all adults put into practice the school's commitment to equality of opportunity and the school's senior leaders track the progress of all the pupils to ensure that none are underachieving. As a result, the pupils do very well in meeting very challenging targets in individual education plans (IEPs). They also make excellent progress in reaching nationally agreed levels of attainment, such as p levels or, in a few cases, National Curriculum levels.

Teachers of primary age pupils focus on giving the pupils the skills that will enable them to learn effectively. The pupils with autism are encouraged very successfully to accept change, to work alongside and with others and to communicate appropriately. As a result, they are able to express how they wish music to be played (for example slow / quick / loud / quiet) and to join in with small group sing songs. Those with severe and profound learning difficulties make very good progress in their ability to make choices and in communicating these decisions. All the pupils consolidate these key skills as they move through the school. This enables them to develop new ones, such

as using information and communication technology (ICT) and applying their numeracy skills. Consequently, they recognise numbers and match them to the correct number of objects and some read simple texts.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development of pupils is a cause for celebration. They are cheerful, articulate, friendly and hard-working young people who have a justifiable pride in their school and display high self-esteem. The pupils have a very strong sense of community because their views are respected and they are encouraged to contribute in many ways. They have taken part in a sponsored walk for charity and they can represent their classmates on the school council. Council members have a real voice. They helped to choose the lunchtime activities, have pressed for changes to the accommodation and contributed to the appointment process for the site manager. They influence a much wider community too. Some pupils worked with the local council in seeking ways to improve leisure activities for people with special needs, and others advised Mencap on their website design.

The pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy eating and they are very keen participants in the range of sporting activities that the school offers. They appreciate what staying safe means and express their feelings, emotions and concerns willingly through activities such as circle time. The post-16 pupils show their increased confidence and self-esteem through membership of larger groups, such as the 'Just Say' self-advocacy organisation that encourages them to discuss with other young people issues associated with a safe and healthy lifestyle.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. A very high regard for the individual contributes significantly to the pupils' spiritual and moral development. Opportunities for social integration are exploited fully and are very successful in helping the pupils to become more competent communicators and to build their confidence, for example in using transport independently. These experiences, along with the pupils' work-related curriculum, provide excellent preparation for leaving school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils learn exceptionally well. The school staff team includes teachers who are particularly knowledgeable and skilled in working with pupils with different types of learning difficulty. Therefore, it makes no difference whether pupils have autism or multiple learning difficulties; they are taught and supported by people who have the

expertise to ensure that they achieve as well as they can. Teachers work closely with very effective teaching assistants to provide a coordinated team approach to meeting these needs. The adults are skilled communicators. Their use of a very good range of approaches ensures the inclusion of all pupils in all the activities. However, sometimes the choice of resources is not well matched to the needs and ages of post-16 students.

Outstanding relationships feature in all lessons. These enable teachers to have high expectations and to maintain an appropriate level of challenge. Praise and encouragement are used extensively and support is available, but this is not just provided without thought. Adults support the pupils in doing things for themselves rather than taking over and doing things for them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The excellent curriculum demonstrates very clearly the clarity of thought of the school's leaders. Eight key skills, such as communication, problem solving and working with others, underpin the curriculum. They are integral to the pupils' individual learning targets, the assessment and recording frameworks and curriculum planning. Senior leaders' highly effective monitoring of teachers' curriculum plans and class timetables ensures that the pupils receive a challenging and varied curriculum that promotes the key skills and meets all statutory National Curriculum requirements. Consequently, the curriculum combines very effectively the promotion of the pupils' personal development with their acquisition of subject knowledge. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 and at post-16 receive a very well designed work-related curriculum that includes careers education, work experience and sampling of vocational subjects.

The school's outstanding partnerships with mainstream schools provide very many opportunities for the pupils to extend the boundaries of their learning. In most cases the pupils work in groups with their mainstream peers on activities such as an arts project and a Balloon Volleyball Festival that took place on the day of the inspection. A few pupils' individual needs are met through attendance at their local school with support from Montacute staff. The nature and extent of these enrichment activities are particularly impressive features of the curriculum. They also include visits (including residential), visitors into school, planned events such as Book Week and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Parents are fully justified in holding the view that their children are safe and well cared for. A range of professionals provides an exceptional level of care and welfare. Speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and nursing staff provide exceptional support for the work that goes on in classrooms by addressing the pupils' medical and related needs so effectively. Their input ensures that pupils

are able to learn very well. Tight procedures are in place for child protection, health and safety and risk assessments. Sufficient staff are trained in first aid and there are rigorous systems for storing and dispensing medication. All the procedures for safeguarding children are in line with current guidance.

Very close liaison between parents, carers and other agencies, such as social services, enhances the care and support that the pupils receive, including those who are in public care. The procedures for guiding and advising the pupils with their work are equally impressive. Teaching assistants work alongside teachers in devising and monitoring the pupils' IEP targets. These are an excellent aid to learning because they are very specific, individual and challenging. Thorough assessment procedures give teachers a detailed understanding of the activities that they need to provide in order for their pupils to learn most effectively. The school has made big strides in involving its pupils in becoming active partners in their learning. Insofar as they are able, they are encouraged to contribute to the long-term targets that are set at the annual reviews of their statement of special educational need. This exercise makes an important contribution to preparing the pupils for leaving school by developing a sense of responsibility.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

A parent noted that Montacute is 'an excellent school, well managed, very diligent and totally focused on ensuring the children achieve to the best they can'. This is a valid assessment. The school is in this position because senior leaders and governors have an excellent understanding of how well the school is doing and how it can be developed further. These considerations are shared with the staff and so there is a unity of purpose throughout the school. As a result, the whole school team has a very sharply articulated vision that remains firmly focused on maintaining the highest possible quality of provision for its pupils. Staff and resources are deployed extremely well to this end.

Montacute was judged as a very good school at the time of the last inspection. It was not left with any key issues to address. However, it has not sat back and coasted; far from it. Led by an outstanding headteacher, the school has maintained its position at the leading edge of special school evolution. There has been excellent improvement since the last inspection. The school has an outstanding capacity to maintain this momentum.

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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	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	1	
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.

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	1	
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 really enjoyed the day that we spent with you. Thank you for being so kind and friendly. You are right to feel very proud about your school. It is an excellent school.

Your teachers are excellent at making lessons enjoyable. They give you plenty of interesting things to do. All of you do a lot to help yourselves as well. You go to school as often as you can, work really hard and behave very, very well. This means that you learn a lot. It is very good to see how much you help other people as well, by being on the school council and taking part in long walks to raise money.

All the adults in school work really hard to make sure that you are safe and looked after. They give you lots of help and many chances to learn about new things when you go on trips. They also help you to grow up as sensible young people and to get ready for leaving school. You know a great deal about being healthy and staying safe.

It is really good to see that many of you go to other schools for some lessons. You obviously like working with these other young people and many of you enjoyed playing in the volleyball competition while we were in your school.

The senior staff do a really good job in running the school. They already have many ideas about how to make the school even better. We have made one further suggestion:

- make sure that in every lesson the oldest ones of you always have things to do that are more suited to your age than some of the things that you do now.

Once again thank you very much. We wish all of you luck in the future.