



Severndale

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123634
Local Authority Shropshire
Inspection number 292726
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007
Reporting inspector Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Hearne Way
School category	Community		Monkmoor
Age range of pupils	2–19		Shrewsbury SY2 5SL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01743 281600
Number on roll (school)	261	Fax number	01743 281666
Number on roll (6th form)	38		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Lynne Hough
		Headteacher	Chris Davies
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2002		

Age group 2–19	Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007	Inspection number 292726
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Severndale School provides for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties. A significant minority has either profound or complex needs, often resulting from physical or sensory disabilities, and an increasing proportion (currently a fifth) has autistic spectrum disorders. Severndale is one of only two special schools in Shropshire and, consequently, its pupils travel in from right across the county. Pupils' social backgrounds reflect the diverse nature of this catchment area and the proportion entitled to free school meals is below average. There is an unusually large number of looked after children, although most of these are on the register because they are in receipt of respite care. Pupils are almost exclusively from a White British background and none has English as an additional language. Typically for this sort of school, there are twice as many boys as girls. Since it was created in 1995 from the merger of two very different schools, Severndale has remained on a split site, shared with a mainstream primary school. It has, however, more than doubled in size. To overcome the challenge of this situation, the school is currently undergoing a major building programme, which will last until 2008, to refurbish and extend its current accommodation and create new, high quality shared facilities. The school was previously a Beacon School and its work has more recently been recognised by a number of awards, including Leading Edge and Gold Healthy School status. It has just submitted a bid to become a Specialist School for Communication and Interaction.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Severndale is a good school with many outstanding features. It continues to improve rapidly because of the visionary leadership provided by the headteacher and his deputy. Working together in effective partnership they have focused very successfully on supporting and encouraging the whole staff team to put pupils' learning and welfare at the centre of their work. As a result, staff provide exceptional care, guidance and support, so that pupils thrive and make excellent progress in their personal development. Although standards are well below average because of the nature and extent of learning difficulties across the school, pupils nevertheless make good progress and achieve well. They get off to a flying start in the Nursery, where teaching of the Foundation Stage curriculum is of very high quality. They then continue with this progress right through the school, because they are well taught and benefit from a rich variety of learning experiences. By the time they leave the Continuing Education Department they have achieved impressive results in an ever widening range of accredited courses and are well prepared for the next stage of their life.

The school has a highly positive ethos, so that relationships between pupils and all adults are excellent. As a result, behaviour is exceptional and pupils relate very well to each other. Staff work in highly productive partnerships with parents, carers and a wide range of agencies and professionals, so that pupils have the particular help that they require. Excellent pastoral care creates a very strong sense of well-being amongst pupils, who therefore feel safe and secure in school, able to thoroughly enjoy their time there. Parents express considerable appreciation of the support that they and their children receive, which often makes their own families' lives so much happier and fulfilling.

There have been significant improvements across the school since the last inspection. Leadership and management responsibilities have been distributed widely across the school, so that members of the recently expanded and reorganised senior leadership team are now more accountable for the quality of the work in their own departments. It also means that monitoring of the school's effectiveness and planning for its improvements are now more of a shared endeavour. This does mean, however, that there is some way to go before all managers have developed the capabilities to make consistent judgements about the quality of teaching and learning and provide the right sort of support and guidance for their colleagues. Governors are fully involved, very well informed, provide outstanding support in strategic planning and excellent challenge in relation to evaluating performance. The school knows itself well, although it is sometimes too modest in its evaluations and does not make the best use of all the information it gathers about itself and pupils' progress. There is strong capacity to follow through on any necessary improvements and complete the rebuilding programme.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision for post-16 students in the Continuing Education Department is good. The curriculum is relevant and challenging. Good quality teaching ensures that students make good progress and achieve well. Students are respected and valued as young adults. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging them to be as independent and assertive as possible, providing them with plenty of opportunities to practise these skills in the wider community of schools, colleges and work experience placements, where appropriate. When combined with excellent pastoral guidance on rights, responsibilities, personal health and safety, students' capabilities to function successfully in life beyond school is nurtured and assured.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of the wealth of assessment data and other evidence that it collects to: - demonstrate the school's effectiveness - evaluate the progress that individuals and groups of pupils make - determine what constitutes good progress.
- Consolidate the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure consistency of judgement and guidance on required improvements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are well below average because of the nature and extent of pupils learning difficulties. Nevertheless, boys and girls of all ages make solidly good progress towards meeting suitably challenging targets, whatever their starting points and learning difficulties. This is because they are grouped imaginatively to give them the best chance of success, are taught well and given exceptional pastoral support. The school has collected assessment information for a number of years and has recently added new, more detailed approaches to provide better evidence of smaller steps in pupils' progress. This wealth of data demonstrates well the progress that pupils make. Pupils' progress has certainly improved since the last inspection as underlying weaknesses in the curriculum and assessment procedures have been addressed, but there is still some work to do to ensure that the most able pupils are properly stretched. Results in the now extensive range of accredited courses mean that pupils' good achievements are recognised and celebrated across basic, practical, vocational, social and independence skills. The year-on-year increases in the number of unit awards achieved are testament to these successes.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are so good because all pupils are treated with respect and courtesy. Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school very much and, consequently, attendance is excellent. There are appropriate opportunities for them to develop their independence throughout the school day. Most pupils are involved in setting their own targets to raise the standard of their work, but there is some inconsistency in this practice. In lessons, pupils are encouraged to take as much responsibility as possible for their own learning. Currently, there is no school council to represent pupils' views and enable them to take an active part in the running of the school, but pupils are being well prepared to become effective members when one is developed and introduced later on this year. Pupils benefit from the good range of activities to support a healthy lifestyle, such as visits to the local sports centre and riding for younger pupils.

The behaviour of pupils is excellent because all staff implement positive behaviour management procedures consistently. Pupils are taught strategies to help them manage their own behaviour and this makes a significant contribution towards their personal development. They are encouraged to consider the consequences of their actions upon themselves and others. The school aims to give pupils the skills they need to become effective members of the community and opportunities to develop their social skills are maximised. Pupils feel safe in the school. If they have any concerns they happily approach an adult, confident that issues will be speedily and effectively dealt with.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Religious studies make a significant contribution towards developing their spiritual sensitivities, and, for example, during a philosophy lesson, pupils in Year 7 were given the opportunity to reflect on the challenging moral question 'If doctors could stop you growing old, would you want them to?' Multicultural awareness is very well promoted throughout the school in a variety of ways. For example, younger pupils were holding both Hindu and Christian wedding ceremonies during the inspection week, with pupils from the neighbouring primary school attending as guests.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers are well supported in improving their skills through team teaching, performance management and well focused training and professional development opportunities.

Teachers and their skilful assistants work in effective partnerships to support pupils' learning well. Good staffing levels and skilled behaviour management, combined with very high quality relationships, ensure that pupils are engaged and well motivated to participate successfully in lessons. Most planning is well informed by assessment of pupils' earlier learning and activities are suitably challenging, but this is not consistent across the school. A wide range of approaches and regular celebration of pupils' achievements make learning meaningful. Teaching encourages pupils' personal development and independence through sharing and cooperative tasks. Imaginative materials and effective use of very good information and communication technology resources encourage pupils' interest and enjoyment. Staff employ a wide range of strategies for meeting pupils' individual needs, such as signing, symbols and visual timetables. They are helped considerably in developing these approaches through active support and advice from the speech and language therapists who work in the school. As a result, all pupils make equally good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides a rich diet of activities to support successful learning and has benefited from focused development and improvement since the last inspection. It is now well planned to provide breadth and relevance to pupils' individual needs, building successfully on their prior learning, starting very well in the Foundation Stage. The full range of subjects is provided, often through imaginative themed activities, such as the comprehensive science week that was in progress during the inspection. Visitors, like the local minister, who 'conducted' one of the wedding ceremonies mentioned earlier, and artists and performers, bring lessons alive and make a valuable contribution to these events. Higher up the school, the currently inadequate accommodation limits the teaching of specialist, practical subjects, but this situation will be remedied by the new building's comprehensive facilities. Extended opportunities for accreditation and vocational studies have improved for older pupils, making good use of other schools and local colleges. The development of their awareness of the world of work and work-place skills is good. For example, older pupils run a mini-enterprise scheme that provides 'tuck' for other pupils. However, work experience opportunities within the wider community are limited, because of the difficulties of finding and arranging suitable placements. Staff nonetheless do their best to overcome this challenge with in-house placements where appropriate. Transport arrangements make it difficult to provide after school enrichment activities, but a number of clubs are provided at lunchtime and good use is made of the wider community to enhance learning in school. The curriculum is most effective in promoting pupils' outstanding personal and social development and self-esteem.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Great care is taken with the induction of new pupils into the school, so that they settle quickly. Transition across departments and on to post-school placements is highly supportive. The in-depth knowledge staff have about pupils' medical and personal needs helps to form the basis of the high standard of care that pupils receive. There are excellent working relationships with other agencies and professionals who provide additional support to pupils.

To ensure continuity of care and behaviour management, well attended workshops and training days are held for parents. Parents are highly appreciative of this and many now feel confident in taking their children into social situations that otherwise would have been impossible. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are rigorous and secure, widely understood and regularly reviewed. Health and safety is also very well managed. The school is currently operating in the middle of a building site and considerable care has been taken to ensure the safety of pupils.

Leading Edge status has enabled the school to provide outstanding support for its pupils into mainstream settings and professional guidance and training for staff in schools across the county.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher has provided exceptional leadership throughout the school's challenging development and has nurtured and sustained a strong sense of team with all his staff and governors. A particular strength is in the support and training provided for staff, who are continually developing their skills as teachers and managers. All staff with leadership responsibilities take them very seriously, and those with a teaching workload provide good role models for teachers. There is, though, still more that could be done to make this effective team generate even faster progress among the pupils. For example, monitoring of teaching and data analyses are still not quite as good as they could be. The governing body fulfils all its statutory duties outstandingly well and has played a significant role in advocating for the school in negotiations with the local authority over budgetary issues and the new building project. The wide range of professional skills that they own has helped them to provide very well focused support and guidance on issues such as staff restructuring. The school is proactive and successful in seeking and obtaining alternative sources of funding and its finances and resources are very well managed.

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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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1	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	2

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	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited you. We came to see how well you are getting on and whether there is anything that could be better.

We agreed with you that your school is a good school that has some very special things about it. You said that you enjoy being there and we could see that. You are all getting on well with your work and are growing into mature young people who are well prepared for your future lives because you know how to keep safe, eat healthily and take exercise. You are helped to be as independent as possible and do lots of things to help yourselves and others. As you get older, you learn about the world of work and how to get on well in groups. We were very impressed by how polite and helpful you are.

The things we liked best were:

- your headteacher is very good at his job and helps all the staff to do their best for you
- you are given the very best support to help you grow and learn
- you are all treated and respected as individuals
- you have lots of good opportunities to learn new and interesting things
- you behave exceptionally well and are kind to each other.

We found two things that we thought the school could do to get even better.

- There is a lot of information about how well everyone does their work and we would like you and your school to use it better.
- The school should make sure all the teachers agree about what makes teaching and learning good.

We hope that you will all keep up the good work and enjoy your new buildings when they are finished.