



Penrose School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123942
Local Authority Somerset
Inspection number 292835
Inspection date 16 January 2007
Reporting inspector Sarah Mascall

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Albert Street
School category	Community		Bridgwater
Age range of pupils	2-19		TA6 7ET
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01278 423660
Number on roll (school)	54	Fax number	01278 431075
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Derrick Pedley
		Headteacher	Sue Neale
Date of previous school inspection	22 October 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small school for pupils with severe and complex needs. Pupils have a range of special educational needs, including severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple difficulties. A small number have autistic spectrum disorders. All have, or are in the process of being assessed for, a statement of special educational needs and their attainment on entry is well below national expectations. Most pupils come from rural areas and their socio-economic background is mixed. All are White British. Just over 10% of pupils are in the care of the local authority. There is a 14-19 year old group of students who are educated together.

The school has just heard that it will be part of a new build project which will establish it on a new site with a mainstream school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Penrose is a good school. Its particular strengths lie in the very good knowledge all staff have of each individual pupil and the care that is provided for them. The systems for the care, guidance and support of pupils are good. This enables pupils to feel safe and develop in confidence and become as independent as possible. Consequently, pupils make good progress in their personal development. They behave very well and clearly enjoy their time in school. The opportunities for pupils to work with their mainstream peers are very good and greatly enhance their social development. The excellent links with the local community are used very well to enrich pupils' experiences and prepare them for the next stage of their education. Parents' very positive views support this and one stated, 'I don't think we could wish for a better school'.

Although pupils' standards are well below national expectations because of their special needs, their achievements overall are good. Pupils get off to a good start in the nursery and this good progress continues throughout their time in school. All pupils benefit from a good curriculum which gives them a wide range of experiences. Teaching is good and staff know their pupils very well. Appropriate steps have been taken to improve the assessment of pupils' broad progress throughout the school. This is beginning to ensure that the targets for pupils are both challenging and achievable.

Leadership and management are good. Senior staff have been effective in ensuring that the school runs well and is a calm, well-ordered place which supports pupils' learning well. There are informal checks on the quality of teaching and learning but these have not been formalised to ensure that good practice is developed. As a result, there are inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teachers' work. This is particularly evident in the recording of the progress pupils make in their lessons. In several classes, this is good, but it is not the case in all. Consequently, it is not always evident what pupils have learnt from the activities they have been involved in.

The senior management team is beginning to use the information on pupils' achievements to analyse how well the different groups of pupils within the school are doing. Although this is at a very early stage, it has enabled the school to be accurate in its assessment of the effectiveness of teaching and achievement of pupils but its evaluation of its overall effectiveness is more positive than that of the inspection team. The weaknesses in evaluating progress have a negative impact on improvement planning, and this means that governors do not have sufficient information on pupils' progress. However, governors, together with staff, have made good progress in developing the school since the last inspection and there is a real sense of determination to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- make more effective use of assessment data to ensure that all pupils are making the best possible progress
- develop more formal systems for checking on the quality of teaching and learning so that there is consistently good practice in all classes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although pupils' standards are well below national expectations, they make good progress in their learning and achieve well. The youngest get off to a good start in the nursery and this good progress is maintained throughout the school. The vast majority of pupils make good progress but the school is aware that for a very small number of more able pupils in Years 10 and 11, progress is satisfactory rather than good. Although pupils in the 14-19 group make good progress in gaining accreditation through ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network), there are limited opportunities for more able pupils to gain a range of accreditation. Pupils in the 14-19 group make very good progress in developing their independence skills which prepares them well for when they move on to college.

All pupils benefit from a wide range of activities that ensure that their senses are developed as much as possible. Those with the most complex difficulties respond well to staff voices, often showing pleasure when listening to songs. Many learn to use eye movements and smile to show their understanding. More able pupils develop their skills in communication well and make good progress in their reading skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pleasure pupils have in going to school is evident from their smiles as they come through the door in the morning. They settle well to their lessons and greatly enjoy the opportunities to take an active part in lessons. Behaviour is very good and pupils show care and concern for each other, playing and working well together. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There is a particularly good emphasis on improving pupils' social skills and this is successful. This is very evident in the mature behaviour of the 14-19 group, especially at lunchtimes when they sit together and chat with each other and staff. Pupils show an understanding of healthy living and are encouraged to make choices. For example, at breaktime they choose between yoghurt or toast and decide what flavour drink they would like. A school council has recently been established, which is beginning to provide pupils with the opportunity to be more involved in developing the school. Pupils respond very well to the opportunities to mix with their mainstream peers. This, together with the excellent links in the community, enables pupils to develop confidence to cope in a range of different settings. This was evident in the work they were doing with mainstream pupils in participating in a Shakespeare play. All these factors ensure that pupils are well prepared to meet the challenges that they will encounter as they grow older.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The strengths in teaching lie in the very good knowledge and understanding staff have of pupils' special needs and the different strategies they use to meet them. There is very good teamwork between teachers and support staff that enables pupils to participate and be involved in all activities. Every effort is made to ensure pupils do not miss anything and physiotherapy sessions, such as stretching exercises, are carried out in the classroom whenever possible. Lessons are lively and pupils are enthusiastic in their responses, such as when asked to select an item off a clothes line in a numeracy lesson. Teachers use their knowledge of pupils to set appropriate targets and these are evident around the classes as a reminder to all staff about what should be achieved. However, although teachers record the activities that pupils have carried out, such records do not always reflect the progress they have made. For example, there is good photographic evidence of the work pupils have done but, because in a few classes these photographs are not dated or explained, they are of limited use in showing pupils' progress. As a result, teachers cannot be sure that pupils' individual academic needs are planned for in each lesson.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides pupils with a good range of experiences which support their learning well. It is well matched to the needs of pupils and there is a good focus on sensory experiences and practical activities. Excellent links with other schools have enabled the school to provide a good range of physical activities for the pupils and this effectively supports their understanding of staying healthy. Links with the community are a strength and are used very well to develop pupils' independence skills and provide them with opportunities to improve their social skills. These are further supported by the very good work experience opportunities that older pupils undertake. Opportunities to achieve external accreditation are satisfactory. Pupils gain accreditation through ASDAN and, for many pupils, this is appropriate. The school has, however, recognised the need to look at a wider range of accreditation for more able pupils in Years 10 and 11.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school places great importance on the care of pupils. It has good systems which support pupils' welfare and ensure that they feel safe and well cared for. One parent commented, 'Staff are very accommodating of any special instructions regarding care'. Good procedures for health and safety and the vetting of staff are in place. Staff know their pupils very well informally; however, formal assessment procedures, although satisfactory, are not as effective as they could be. This is because the school's

assessments do not always reflect the progress pupils have made, and this has implications in ensuring that individual needs are met as fully as possible in every lesson. The school has recognised this and has recently introduced a new system which will enable staff to assess more effectively the small steps made by pupils, particularly those with the most complex needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership team has ensured that the school is, as a parent described it, 'a happy welcoming place', where staffing is stable and of good quality. The school has been successful in ensuring that staff are well trained and because of this, there is a very good understanding of pupils' special needs which in turn ensures pupils make good progress. The clear leadership structure ensures staff are aware of their responsibilities but the leadership team has not been effective in checking on the quality of teaching and learning. A few subject leaders have checked the quality of teaching within their subjects but there is too much reliance by the leadership team on informal visits to lessons. Although they have an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses within teaching, there has been no whole-school focus on improving teaching and learning. As a result, inconsistencies in teaching have not always been identified.

Self-evaluation procedures are being developed and the use of data on pupils' progress is beginning to provide staff with information about the school's effectiveness. This is evident in the school's realistic view of its effectiveness with regard to achievement and teaching. However, the school is over-generous in its judgements of the effectiveness of other aspects.

The role of the governing body has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Governors are more questioning than in the past and are developing their role as 'critical friends'. Together with the senior management team and staff, they show a commitment to provide the best for the pupils and there is good capacity to improve.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	1
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
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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	3
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
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 welcome in your school and giving up your time to talk to us. We enjoyed meeting you and looking at all the work you have done.

Penrose is a good school. Your teachers know you very well and teaching is good. Because of this, you make good progress in your learning and achieve well. There are lots of things to do during the day which help you learn and which you clearly enjoy. You all behave very well and we were impressed by how well you all get on together. You have lots of opportunities to go out of school and you know how to behave in different places and how to get on with people. The school makes sure you are well looked after and has good systems for making sure you keep safe. It is beginning to get better at checking how well you are doing and to use this information to make sure everyone makes the best possible progress. Teachers have records such as photographs to show what you know but they do not always date these or write what you have learnt. This makes it difficult for them to show that you are making enough progress.

Your school is well led and the school is a happy and welcoming place. Staff work well together, particularly the teachers and their assistants. The senior teachers know what goes on in classes but they do not have a formal way of checking if things are improving.

We have asked the school to do two things to improve further:

- make better use of the information it has about you to ensure every pupil makes the best possible progress
- improve the checking of the quality of teaching and learning so that areas that need improving can be identified.

You can help by making sure your views are heard through the school council so that the school becomes even better.

We wish you well for the future.