



Kemball Special School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124503
Local Authority Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number 293016
Inspection date 7 December 2006
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	Duke Street
School category	Community		Fenton
Age range of pupils	2-19		Stoke-on-Trent ST4 3NR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 234879
Number on roll (school)	56	Fax number	01782 234880
Number on roll (6th form)	5	Chair	Hilary Gregory
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Elizabeth Spooner
Date of previous school inspection	29 October 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Kemball School provides education for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many of them have additional needs, such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), tube feeding or life threatening conditions. There has been a steady increase in the proportion of pupils who have complex difficulties. It currently stands at a third of the school population, and is predicted to continue rising. The school is in a deprived inner city area and most of the pupils come from this background. Unusually for this type of school, there are more girls than boys, by a ratio of 4 to 3. A sixth of the pupils are from Asian ethnic minority families and most of these have English as an additional language. The pattern of admissions to the school is unpredictable, and learners join the school at any time across the year and age groups. A recent local authority (LA) reorganisation of special education for students over 16 has meant that the school has no 17 year olds in its post-16 department, and the few remaining 18 and 19 year olds will be the last in the school as this facility is run down.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Kemball is an outstanding school. It provides exceptionally effective care and support for its pupils and their families, particularly for those with the most complex needs. The work of a home-school link worker and a bilingual assistant is a significant element of the school's successful commitment to building and sustaining an all-important partnership with parents and carers. Regular seeking of their views demonstrates that this key aspect is highly valued and appreciated. Pupils are helped to make excellent progress in their personal development through highly focused, unsentimental guidance, which helps them to become as confident and independent as they can be. They are clearly very happy to be at school and demonstrate a surprising maturity when encouraged to play an active part in their own education. Their attendance is good and their behaviour is exemplary.

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher's visionary leadership has enabled the school to continue developing and improving, despite the difficulties it has encountered with a regularly reducing budget and insecurities around its future character and role. She has been very ably supported in her work by highly professional senior managers, a first rate governing body and a highly committed staff team. This impressive combination assures the school's very strong capacity to sustain its current quality, to effect necessary improvements and to cope with any changes required of it.

Pupils arrive at the school performing significantly below national standards. Most make excellent progress, no matter how severe their difficulties, and achieve very well in their priority areas of need. Those that are able to are starting to negotiate their own targets and evaluate progress against them. The school has plans to develop this involvement further, and this would mean that many more pupils could have these opportunities as part of the school's intention to 'give pupils their own voice'. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers work in very successful partnership with excellent classroom support staff and other professionals and agencies to provide an engaging range of well tailored programmes of work and activities for their pupils. However, the large classes that stem from a low budget and the very wide age and ability range in most classes put particular pressure on them. The currently small numbers of Foundation Stage children are provided with appropriate learning programmes alongside pupils in Year 1, within an early years class. The curriculum is good overall, having particular strengths in the expressive and visual arts, which provide many opportunities for pupils to work alongside their peers from other special and mainstream schools. The school has been awarded Sports Mark Active, Eco School and Healthy School status, all of which make a significant contribution to pupils' social and physical development and healthy lifestyle.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision in the post-16 department has been developed to a very high standard, so that students study a wide range of relevant, externally accredited courses, and, in some cases, attend work experience placements. This prepares them very well for the next stage of their lives, including going on to college placements. As the department works towards its closure at the end of the current academic year, there are appropriate plans in place to ensure that the few remaining students continue to do well in response to very good teaching and highly effective care, support and guidance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Find ways, working together with the LA, to increase the number of teachers and classes, so that pupils can learn in groups with a narrower range of age and ability.
- Ensure that as many pupils as possible are fully involved in their statement reviews by negotiating their own targets and evaluating progress towards them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Whilst, because of their significant learning difficulties, pupils' standards are well below those expected for their age, most make excellent gains in their learning and achieve very good results across all aspects of the curriculum. A small number who have serious medical conditions which lead to prolonged absence, and sometimes regression in their learning, are helped to achieve as much as possible through good outreach work. The comprehensive assessment data collected across the school demonstrates clearly that there are no significant differences in the performance of pupils with specific needs or from particular backgrounds. For example, pupils with English as an additional language make very good progress in developing their communication and literacy skills and the small number of looked after children achieve equally well. The few children currently in the Foundation Stage make good, solid progress. Learning targets are set to be challenging yet achievable, and those pupils who are fully involved in deciding their own targets benefit greatly from this experience.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are exceptional. During their time at school, they become self-confident, happy young people. They have outstanding relationships with the adults who help them, and with each other. It is not unusual to see more able pupils helping their less capable peers around the school, and there is a very strong culture of mutual support and respect. Pupils learn very well, through

the many opportunities they are given, to develop healthy lifestyles. They are very straightforward about how safe and secure they feel, and are able to explain how they could talk to staff if they were worried about anything. Pupils make a significant contribution to their school and wider communities. Elected members of the school council take their responsibilities extremely seriously and have influenced decisions made about proposed changes. Pupils take a full part in many community activities and contribute to local and national fundraising events. They also successfully gain those skills that will stand them in good stead for their future lives, especially in improving their speaking and listening and other aspects of literacy and numeracy. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' very good achievements across the school are a result of the consistently high quality of teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum. Lessons are very carefully planned, based on a thorough understanding of each pupil's needs and learning targets. In most of the classes, the wide range of need and age makes this a particularly demanding task, and staff do an excellent job in overcoming the challenge. It is particularly impressive in these circumstances that ASD pupils are accommodated as well as they are, through, for example, the use of visual timetables, symbols and individualised programmes of work. The decision to have two separate, smaller classes for pupils with the most complex needs is well advised, although, wherever possible, such pupils are included successfully in other classes. Teachers and assistants work extremely effectively together to ensure pupils are always fully engaged and busy. The very good use of computers and interactive whiteboards helps considerably in this respect. Classes are calm and the atmosphere is always purposeful, because the management of any difficult behaviour is low key and highly effective. As a result, pupils try hard and enjoy their work very much.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. Its strengths lie in its relevance and variety. A strong focus on enrichment through very productive use of the local and wider communities, the work of artists in residence, music festivals, performing arts and sporting activities makes learning fun. Many of these activities involve working and competing with mainstream pupils. Learning is very well planned to match pupils' needs, especially in developing their communication skills. The Foundation Stage curriculum informs the work of the early years group, preparing these pupils well for the next stage of their learning. However, as with most other classes, the inappropriate grouping makes it difficult to

ensure that all activities are suitable for the ages and needs of the whole class. For example, at the moment there is insufficient focus on learning through play. The provision of booster groups for some older pupils ensures that any adverse effects are minimised. The exceptionally high quality provision for developing pupils' personal and social skills extends through all aspects of their timetable, including at break and lunchtimes, when various clubs provide stimulation and enjoyment. There are very good opportunities for pupils to develop basic information and communication technology skills, which makes their work across all subjects more engaging and effective. The school has managed through very careful budgeting to make a number of improvements to the facilities within the building and in the outside environment, both of which are attractive and welcoming.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support of pupils are excellent. Risk assessment and staff guidance, for example, for lifting pupils who have physical disabilities, are very detailed and supportive. Similarly, behaviour plans for those pupils who need them provide clear and effective strategies. Safeguarding procedures and child protection requirements are robust and very well understood by all staff.

There are highly effective links between home and school, for example, through home school books and the work of extremely able support staff. Excellent liaison and partnerships with a wide range of professionals and agencies enable these specialists to work very effectively with teachers and classroom support staff, to ensure pupils' additional needs are very well met.

The annual review meetings are an object lesson in how best to conduct these sometimes difficult meetings, so that parents, carers and older pupils are fully involved, and feel valued partners in the process. The school is currently developing opportunities for all pupils to do so, wherever possible and practical, as part of a wider ambition to 'give them a voice' in determining their own lives and learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding, with strength in depth across the school and highly efficient administrative staff providing important support. The headteacher and leadership team have clear ambition and direction for the school to develop further, and the standard of their work sets an important example for all of the school. They have built a strong and cohesive team who work together exceptionally well, so that the school finds effective ways of dealing with challenges, like the grouping difficulties, and successfully weathers any storm. New staff, and those who cover absences, feel welcomed and well informed, so that they are quickly

able to be effective in their role. Parents and carers are very pleased with their children's education and feel very involved. Equality of opportunity is promoted fully.

The school's self-evaluation processes are detailed and comprehensive. Leaders are, however, overly modest when reporting outcomes and, consequently, the process undervalues the quality of the school's work, most especially in relation to its pastoral provision. Self-review is very effectively informed by regular monitoring and by robust performance management, which in turn influences excellent professional development opportunities for all staff. The highly professional and effective governors are very active and well informed partners in monitoring quality and providing strong support in the school's very good development planning processes. They have had a particularly helpful impact on managing a very tight budget and act as strong advocates for their school in wider LA debates about its future.

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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 quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2
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	2	
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?	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?	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

As you know, I recently visited Kemball with a colleague to find out how well you are doing. Thank you for looking after us and making us feel so welcome. We really enjoyed seeing your work and talking to you. We were particularly impressed by the members of your school council, who clearly take their responsibilities on your behalf very seriously, and make sure that your views and wishes are taken fully into account when any changes are being discussed.

We agree with you and your parents that your school is outstanding.

What we liked most about your school:

- the excellent care that all staff take of you, so that you can become as independent and mature as possible
- the way that you love coming to school, work extremely hard, and want to learn.
- the good range of things that you do and learn about
- the very effective way that your teachers, assistants and other adults work with you
- the very good progress that you make, especially towards your targets
- the exceptional way your school is run.

We felt that your school would be even better if:

- there were smaller classes
- more of you could be involved in setting your own targets and involved in your reviews.

You could help to make things even better by thinking about your own targets and trying to achieve them as quickly as possible.