

Queen's Croft Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124521
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	293020
Inspection dates	29–30 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	131
6th form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Loretta Light
Headteacher	John Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003
School address	Birmingham Road Lichfield WS13 6PJ
Telephone number	01543 510669
Fax number	01543 510673

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Queen's Croft is a large special school providing for pupils with learning difficulties ranging from profound and multiple learning difficulties to those with less severe or moderate learning difficulties. Some pupils have significant medical and complex learning needs. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is about average for the type of school. From September 2006, the school no longer accepted primary aged pupils.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. All the pupils achieve well in their studies and some make excellent progress. Pupils love coming to school and parents are very happy for their children to attend, knowing they will be safe and happy and that the school has high expectations of their success. One parent's comment was typical: 'My child has come on in leaps and bounds.' Pupils' achievements are underpinned by the excellent progress they make in their personal development.

The pupils enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. The teaching is good because lessons are invariably interesting and well managed. The classroom staff know pupils' attainment very well and this enables them to work productively with pupils to enhance their learning. However, inconsistencies in the accuracy of the assessment of pupils' small steps in progress mean that individual targets are not always clear enough and as a result learning sometimes slows down. Pupils in the sixth form, who, generally, have more pronounced learning difficulties, achieve equally well. All pupils, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with autism, are fully included in the curriculum. The provision is enriched by the many opportunities the pupils have to interact with the community, by good programmes in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, and in well organised work-related learning for older pupils.

Pupils thrive within the caring and supportive ethos of the school. The social and moral development of pupils is outstanding. They feel very secure and well supported. They learn to remain healthy, to keep safe and to behave extremely well. They value the school and this is evident through the very good relationships they have with staff and the good attendance of most pupils. They are well prepared for moving on to the next stage in their lives, whether it is through further education, employment or training. Inconsistencies in the assessment of their academic progress sometimes restrict the effectiveness of educational support and guidance because targets are not always clear and helpful.

The good leadership and management have driven the good provision made. The headteacher and senior staff have been effective in monitoring and improving standards in a period of substantial change for the school. The governing body has been a tower of strength throughout the change. The governors offer very strong support and outstanding strategic leadership to the school. The school evaluates its own work accurately. School managers are aware, for instance, of the need to improve the quality of assessment of pupils' small learning steps and have recently introduced a new recording system, which seeks to address the situation. The school has made good progress since the last inspection and has maintained this progress through recent extensive building works and the substantial changes to provision. There is a good capacity to continue this improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form has developed well since it began in 2006. The provision is well managed, there are good relationships between staff and pupils and the pupils are making good progress. Despite the same inconsistencies in assessment and target setting as in the school as a whole, teaching is good. The curriculum is appropriately focused on the development of each pupil's abilities in literacy and numeracy and on the development of their personal, social and vocational

skills. Every opportunity is taken to increase the pupils' independence and awareness of choices. The pupils receive the same outstanding care and support, as do those in Years 7 to 11. The teacher in charge of the provision has a secure understanding of how to make further improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve assessment so that it captures each small step in the pupils' learning.
- Improve the sharpness and focus of learning targets so that they always show pupils clearly how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

All the pupils achieve well and some make outstanding progress, although standards are below average. Standards are lower in the sixth form than in the rest of the school due to pupils' more pronounced learning difficulties. Although pupils enter the school with very low levels of attainment, many of the higher ability pupils catch up well and gain levels of accreditation in Year 11 that are only a little way below those in mainstream schools. This represents good progress. Other pupils with more severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties remain on earlier stages of learning and development, and their progress is measured against individual targets. Most of these are well met, demonstrating their good achievements. For example, pupils with autistic spectrum conditions make excellent progress in their communication and personal development. There is no evidence to suggest that any group of pupils performs differently from others or that progress varies between subjects.

The tracking of pupils' progress in the acquisition of basic skills is good and this has a positive impact on their continuing achievement. Levels of support are appropriately adjusted to address identified underachievement. Pupils make outstanding progress in meeting challenging personal development targets in their individual education plans.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils' excellent progress in most aspects of their personal development, including their moral and social development, reflects the school's strong management of behaviour and emphasis on moral and social values. The pupils' spiritual and cultural understanding is good. Pupils gradually develop an increasingly strong awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles through the many opportunities to take part in physical activity. They make excellent gains in their social skills and their ability to collaborate with others because teachers provide many structured opportunities for them to work together. Pupils contribute significantly to the well-being of everyone at the school through, for example, the opportunities provided by the school council. Encouraged by staff, they practise and generalise their personal skills throughout the day in all their activities. They develop skills relevant to their futures extremely well. Pupils feel safe and confident, and know what is expected of them within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere. They told inspectors that there was no bullying or intimidation at school. Parents confirm that their children really enjoy their learning. As one parent wrote, 'My son loves going to school. He is enthusiastic and happy.' This is reflected in the pupils' good

attendance and very positive attitudes to school, which have a substantial impact on their achievements. Those parents who returned questionnaires generally had high praise for the school and its impact on their children's lives. A few parents were however still concerned over their child's recent change of school and some felt communication with school could be improved.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers and their assistants have a good understanding of their pupils' overall ability and this, together with the teachers' well managed deployment of their staff, enables them to work effectively with small groups or individuals. Pupils thus receive a high level of support and this has a positive impact on their achievement. Planning for lessons is generally good although teachers do not always efficiently record each small step in the pupils' progress and consequently their learning targets are sometimes less well focused. Pupils like their teachers and the support staff, and so respond very well in lessons. Teachers motivate pupils effectively through interesting and well paced lessons. They make good use of interactive whiteboards and touch screens to enliven lessons and keep the pupils' attention. As a result, pupils become more confident in taking part. The management of behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Pupils understand and respond well to the clear routines, and this assists in keeping a strong focus on learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It meets requirements and is enriched by frequent trips and events and a varied programme of lunchtime clubs. This adds considerably to the pupils' enjoyment of school. Programmes in personal, social and health education underpin much of the school's work and these have a significant impact on pupils' achievement in their personal skills, their knowledge about the advantages of a healthy lifestyle and about their own safety. There are well managed and effective programmes in basic skills, especially since teachers add rigour to their planning by making good use of the national strategies for literacy and numeracy. Teachers have reacted well to the recent changes in the age and ability levels of pupils entering the school. They are successfully adapting learning programmes in response to the increasingly wide range of learning difficulties of pupils, and the school acknowledges the need to continue with this work. The arrangements for vocational and work-related learning are good. Pupils are encouraged to take part in a well organised work experience programme and the success of this is reflected in the excellent number of those continuing further education, employment or training when pupils leave school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The physical and emotional care of pupils is outstanding. There are rigorous safeguarding procedures, such as child protection procedures and checks on staff and these help to ensure the school is a safe and happy place. Parents find this reassuring and pupils greatly appreciate it. Pupils have a clear understanding of their behavioural targets and those for their personal development. As a result, they make excellent progress in their social skills and in developing their confidence to make independent choices. This is an outstanding strength of the school. Pupils have very good relationships with staff and look to them as trusted providers of guidance and support. The pupils receive a high level of support in lessons and through this are helped to do their best. Although they are often reminded of their learning targets and work on them in specific lessons, the targets are not always sufficiently focused to enable the pupils to understand how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior staff have guided the school through a difficult period of significant change and they have successfully led a staff team which helps all pupils to thrive equally and achieve well, and which is committed to seeking improvement. Managers at all levels have a good grasp of the school's strengths and where there needs to be improvement. For instance, through careful monitoring they have now identified inconsistencies in the recording of each element of pupils' progress. As a result, they have recently introduced a better assessment framework with the aim of enabling staff to both analyse the pupils' progress more rigorously and consistently set more precise and challenging targets, in order to help pupils achieve even more.

Communication within the school is excellent. The staff feel fully consulted, involved and valued. There are excellent procedures to support new staff and the quality of professional training is good. This makes a significant contribution to sustaining consistency in the good quality of teaching and, in turn, pupils' good achievement. Resources are well used and the school gives good value for money, particularly in the flexible deployment of staff to support pupils when necessary. Governors provide excellent support to the school, accompanied by high levels of monitoring and challenge to the school's management. This too has had a positive impact on pupils' achievements because of the consistent focus on securing improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	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	

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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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?	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.

Annex A

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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	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

1 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Queen's Croft Special School, Lichfield WS13 6PJ

Not long ago we came to your school to see how you were getting on and whether we could suggest anything to make the school better. You made us very welcome and we enjoyed meeting some of you in the classroom and at the school council. Thank you and well done!

We were only with you for two days. That was long enough for us to realise that you go to a good school. We could see that you all enjoy school very much. There were lots of things that we liked. Here are a few.

- You work hard and make good progress in your work and excellent progress in your personal development.
- You have a good range of activities, particularly those that help you become independent and make choices and prepare you for when you leave school.
- Your teachers and the many different people at the school look after you very well.
- Lessons are interesting and you are well taught. This means you enjoy learning and do your best.
- Your school is well run.

We think the school could improve even further if the staff were to carefully write down each little bit of progress that you make. This would help them to give you targets to aim for which you all understood very clearly.

You can help too, just by going on working as hard as you have been doing!

Please thank your parents for the helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Best wishes to you all.

Mel Blackband Lead inspector

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