

Solar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	127715
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	293593
Inspection dates	20–21 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Saleem Hussain

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	10–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	52
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr T Harney
Headteacher	Ms Christine Royle
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	235 Leasowe Road Wallsey Wirral CH45 8RE
Telephone number	0151 6376064
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school was established in September 2005 and this is its first inspection. The school caters for pupils with severe social, emotional, behavioural and other learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. The school also hosts an inclusion base where pupils either excluded, or in danger of being excluded, from their mainstream schools are referred by the local authority and their schools. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Most pupils take free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and fast improving school. Pupils make satisfactory progress in their academic learning and good progress in their personal development. Standards in English, mathematics and science are exceptionally low because of previous poor attendance or the time pupils have spent out of school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils develop their self-confidence well and learn to be responsible and patient. Attitudes to learning and behaviour are good. The number of exclusions has markedly reduced since the school opened and in most cases pupils' attendance is satisfactory. The school effectively promotes good behaviour. Pupils value the merits system whereby they can earn rewards and treats for effort, discipline and achievement. Teaching is improving and several lessons observed were judged to be good. However, learning is satisfactory because more time is needed to see clear evidence of the impact of teaching on the progress made by pupils. Pupils value the strong care, support and guidance offered by the school and this helps them achieve satisfactorily. Teaching assistants give effective support in the classroom. The curriculum is satisfactory and meets pupils' needs. Although poor accommodation restricts teaching and learning in science and physical education, the school works around this as best it can by using facilities in the local community.

Pupils enjoy learning because work is presented in a stimulating way and their achievements are valued. In an information and communication technology (ICT) lesson Year 9 pupils were encouraged to talk about their strengths in their 'all about me' presentations for the headteacher. While in school pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and make good choices in what they eat during the school day. Discussions in lessons make a good contribution to raising pupils' awareness about issues such as obesity, smoking and alcohol abuse. Pupils say that they feel safe because bullying is not tolerated in school and they are confident that adults will always help them if they have any problems. The school council enables pupils to influence school policies and make suggestions. The school has responded to pupils' wishes to give them more chances for discussion in lessons. Pupils also show concern for the wider community. There is much fund-raising for good causes. Pupils are well prepared for life after school. Careers advice is regularly available and there are good chances for long periods of work experience in Year 10.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides clear direction for the school and with the help of a very supportive governing body has established a strong team of dedicated and skilful staff. Strong community links are maintained. There is effective liaison with the local authority in addressing some of the accommodation issues. In view of how well the school has raised pupils' aspirations, instilled good attitudes to learning, developed strong support mechanisms and improved teaching, all in a short period of time, the school shows good capacity for improvement. As there is a little way to go regarding pupils' academic progress, the school is judged as providing satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Ensure teaching is consistent so that there is measurable impact on the academic progress made by pupils.
- Improve attendance.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged as satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted Inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The school works hard to obtain information about the attainment on entry for all pupils but this is unavailable for some. Based on school records and discussions with pupils, the attainment on entry for most pupils is judged as exceptionally low in English, mathematics and science. Pupils make satisfactory progress in relation to their capabilities. This includes pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some pupils make better progress in subjects such as art and ICT because there are more chances for practical work which pupils prefer. The great majority of pupils make good improvements in their personal development, especially their behaviour. A judgement for standards achieved when pupils leave cannot be given as the great majority of pupils are still at school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development is good. Pupils develop their self-discipline and mature well as a result of the school's strong personal and social education. Representative comments from pupils included, 'I know now that I have to be patient, not get frustrated and try harder to learn as well as I can.' and 'I've learnt to respect other people because I am treated with respect myself.' Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. In a discussion about animal rights it was said that, 'They have as much right to a good life as people do, they should not be treated badly and cruelty is really sickening.' Pupils learn well about other cultures around the world. Much work is done about life in Madagascar and the customs, traditions and religious beliefs of people there. Pupils develop good attitudes and behaviour through an effective system of rewards and sanctions. Attendance is satisfactory overall. Most pupils make good improvements in their attendance, but a significant number do not.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Pupils' work shows that teaching and learning have improved recently. One of the reasons pupils enjoy school is because they like and respect their teachers. In a poem to the inspector, one pupil wrote, 'The teachers in my school are cool, they run the school with a golden rule, if you do your work and don't get bored, you will get a great reward.' Some good teaching was seen during the inspection. Strengths in teaching include planning to ensure the progress of all pupils, attention to basic skills, outstanding management of pupils, good relationships and stimulating presentation of work. Lessons are well structured to meet pupils' needs and support for learning through well deployed and active teaching assistants is strong. The pace of lessons is sometimes too slow and targets are not always challenging enough. Assessment and marking is satisfactory. Pupils are increasingly guided to assess their own work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum, adequately meeting the needs of all pupils. Provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT are satisfactory. Accommodation restricts learning in science and physical education. The school works around this by providing additional opportunities in the local community, although valuable learning time is lost in travel. Provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education is good, leading to strong personal development. Within this, health and safety education is good. The school nurse regularly gives talks to pupils on issues such as drugs and peer pressure. Several educational visits are offered and, for example, Year 10 pupils visit Liverpool Airport as part of their business studies. Visitors have included an African drumming group and this develops pupils' awareness of other cultures well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Representative views from pupils included comments like, 'Staff are patient with you, they persuade you to work hard telling you its worth it because it will help you make the most of yourself. There are lots of people in school we can turn to for allsorts of help.' Procedures for child protection, health and safety are in place and regularly reviewed. Links with outside agencies are effective. The learning mentor, pupil support worker and behavioural support officer all make a strong contribution to the school's work and provide effective support. Pupils say that the 'chill out' room is effective, enabling them to take reasonable time out when they get frustrated. Pupils especially value the rewards system whereby they can earn privileges and treats. Academic guidance is satisfactory but pupils are sometimes not clear about steps to take to improve their academic progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school is focussed on raising standards and successfully promotes the personal development and well-being of pupils. The school has tackled staffing issues effectively and created a common sense of purpose underpinned by strong teamwork at all levels. The school knows its strengths and areas for development well. Effective monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching are successfully raising the quality of teaching. Lesson planning is now good and lessons are better structured to meet the needs of all pupils. Standards in English are being raised effectively by providing more learning chances in other subjects and similar approaches are developing well in mathematics. The governing body has worked tirelessly to help establish the school and provides effective support in many regards. Inclusion is at the heart of the school's work. The achievements of vulnerable pupils and girls are monitored carefully and effective support is put in place to ensure that they achieve as well as other groups. The school runs smoothly and resources are satisfactorily used to improve outcomes. The school has a good reputation with parents and regularly organises courses and workshops to help them become more effectively involved in their children's education.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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	3
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	2
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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.

Annex A

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	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	3
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 all your help during the Inspection of your school and for making me so welcome. Firstly, I want to share with you a poem that one of you passed to me just as I finished inspecting your school:

The teachers in my school are cool,
They run the school with a golden rule,
If you do your work and don't get bored,
You will get a great reward,
Swimming, Snooker, Food-tech, Art,
Make your choice and take part,
I feel quite sad when the day is over,
I can't wait to go bed to start all over.

Having spoken to so many of you, I know that this is what you think about your school. Your school is satisfactory and improving all the time. Your personal development is good, especially your behaviour. I was pleased to see that you enjoy school. I was impressed by how hard you work in lessons. I think that you are developing good attitudes towards healthy living and your awareness of safety is good. Members of the school council and others who take up responsibilities do super jobs. You make a good contribution to the community, especially through your fund-raising for charities and good causes. I was pleased to see that teaching is satisfactory and it helps you learn. Care, support and guidance are good and the curriculum is satisfactory. Your school is in good hands. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and other adults are working hard to make sure you make progress. The full report about the school says all the things in this letter. I think the school now needs to:

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science
- improve teaching so that it is all of a high quality
- improve attendance.

I know that you can play a really important part in these challenges.