



Holbrook Centre for Autism

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131323
Local Authority DERBYSHIRE
Inspection number 293738
Inspection date 1 February 2007
Reporting inspector Susan Lewis

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Type of school | Special | School address | Portway |
| School category | Community special | | Belper |
| Age range of pupils | 5-19 | | Derbyshire DE56 0TE |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01332 880208 |
| Number on roll (school) | 41 | Fax number | 01332 781916 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Mrs Margaret Reeve |
| | | Headteacher | Mr David Heald |
| Date of previous school inspection | 4 November 2002 | | |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Holbrook is a residential special school that caters for pupils with autism and severe learning difficulties; almost all also have challenging behaviour. Currently, there are no pupils in the Foundation Stage and just six students attend the school's post-16 provision. Nineteen pupils spend one or two nights a week in the boarding provision. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage; very few are from other ethnic origins and all but three pupils are boys. Pupils come from a range of socio-economic circumstances. When pupils enter the school, their knowledge and skills are well below those expected at their age, particularly their communication skills.

The school provides an outreach service supporting staff and pupils in mainstream schools.

The school has a number of awards including Investors in People and National Healthy Schools Status. A building programme has started and the school will soon expand.

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. It has some outstanding features and a few areas which are still improving. Parents are highly satisfied with the school. One describes it as 'a fantastic school ... because of the level of care, support and education provided: it helps to make life a little easier to cope with in the difficult situation of bringing up a child with autism.' The headteacher, staff and governors have high aspirations for pupils with autism and the school's outreach service is valued by those it supports in mainstream schools. The school is well led and managed.

Although standards are very low, because of pupils' learning difficulties, pupils achieve well because teaching is effective. The school provides a good range of learning opportunities that successfully encourage pupils' independence, building of self-esteem and social and communication skills. Pupils' personal development is good. An excellent programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), is very well linked to pupils' current and future needs, supports their personal development very well. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. This is because staff have high levels of skill in the management of behaviour and are consistent in how they support pupils. Care, support and guidance are also good. Excellent team work between all school staff, other agencies and families mean that pupils make particularly good progress in managing their autism.

Pupils clearly feel safe and secure in school and enjoy the wide range of activities provided. As a result, their attendance is excellent. The strong and highly relevant curriculum, including a very good range of work-related and enterprise activities allows pupils to apply their communication and numeracy skills in meaningful and highly motivating ways. Pupils gain a good understanding of business principles. The 'can do' attitude of the school means that some pupils make remarkable progress in their ability to be part of and contribute to a more social world.

The school has been creative and determined in providing for its post-16 students. Staff have worked hard and developed strong partnerships with other schools and colleges to ensure these students make satisfactory progress and have some good learning opportunities. However, this provision has developed in an ad hoc manner and its accommodation is unsuitable. Limited resources and lack of funding constrains its activities and development and restricts student opportunities. A lack of clarity about its future has contributed to the school's overspent budget. The local authority and school leadership team have been in extensive discussion about what to do, but as yet there is no clear strategy for dealing with the deficit. As a result, the school provides satisfactory, rather than good value for money. The imminent expansion of the school offers further challenges, and whilst the deficit exists, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The residential provision is good; it is well led and managed. Pupils' development is very well supported by work done here. Particular strengths of the provision, in addition to its high quality of care and concern, are the ways in which it works with the pupils and families to target key behaviour and independence skills. This makes a very strong contribution to pupils' achievement and personal development. Careful groupings of pupils and identification of activities ensure each is in an environment that supports very well their well-being and achievement. Parents value the provision greatly. One says 'because it is such a caring, secure environment we confidently let our child go.'

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) report of November 2006 acknowledges high standards of care and welfare. All care standards were met and several were exceeded; all recommendations have been dealt with. Demand for residential places exceeds provision. The expansion of the school will exacerbate this further. There are no clear plans to deal with this.

What the school should do to improve further

- Work with and agree with the Local Authority a recovery plan that will reduce the budgetary deficit and convert this to a sensible contingency.
- Improve the accommodation for Post 16 students and liaise with the Local Authority to agree the long term future of this provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' attainment remains very low throughout their school careers. This is entirely the result of the nature and extent of their learning difficulties. Because the school provides a good quality of education, pupils make good progress and achieve well. Pupils regularly reach the challenging personal targets set for them. Their communication skills develop rapidly and all have a suitable means of communicating with others by the time they leave. Pupils become well able to communicate with people outside school, using speech, signs or strips of symbols and text, because they have very good opportunities to practice this skill.

The school makes good use of the assessment information that it collects to evaluate the progress made by pupils. When this is less than that expected, there are convincing reasons for this and the school does all it can to accelerate the pupils' progress.

The standards achieved by students at Post 16 are satisfactory. The range of externally accredited courses available to older pupils has increased since the last inspection. Last summer, three students completed the coursework for the Youth Award Scheme Bronze Award; four were successful in achieving up to five modules on the Towards Independence award; a very small number achieved a City and Guilds certificate in Horticulture. However, the school is rightly looking to extend the range of accreditation

available, particularly for those who are achieving at the higher levels; it has good plans in place to do this.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Support for personal development underpins all of the school's work. It looks carefully at how all pupils are offered opportunities to achieve in this area. As a result, pupils progress well and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils make excellent progress in their self help skills, their independence and their awareness of self and others. This is because of staff's skills in supporting pupils' communication and in giving the pupils just enough help in order to achieve something. Consequently, as they progress through the school, all pupils make great strides in their ability to make simple choices and to express their needs, in the ways they listen, attend and engage with lessons, with other people and with new experiences. Because staff are vigilant in anticipating where difficulties might occur and give clear signals to pupils as to how they are doing, behaviour is excellent, given the range of difficulty and need. Attendance is excellent.

The excellent PSHCE programme, community visits and visitors, strong emphasis on work-related learning and exciting business and enterprise programme all support pupils' self esteem, enjoyment, achievement and their ability to make a contribution; pupils are proud of their achievements here. However, opportunities are missed to encourage pupils to make healthy choices at lunchtimes and when staff offer sweets as rewards. The relatively new school council is still developing its role and the school is seeking even more ways of ensuring that pupils' ideas and views are heard in relation to improving school life and their own learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Accurate assessment information is used well to plan tasks that are well matched to pupils' needs; lesson plans identify both what pupils are to learn as a whole as well as pupils' personal targets. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

Staff have good relationships with pupils, who clearly feel secure in school. Their trust in staff was very evident in a lesson where staff supported pupils who worked well with unfamiliar sports coaches to learn basketball skills. Staff are well trained in managing pupils, so there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in most lessons; pupils are most often cooperative and any incidents of challenging behaviour are short-lived. Staff make good use of a range of methods to support pupils' understanding, including signing and the use of symbols combined with text. They organise rooms well to minimise distractions, which helps pupils to focus on tasks they are given. Teachers

and their assistants work very well together in partnership, giving good support, encouragement and praise. They are beginning to involve pupils in evaluating their success. This practice is well developed at post-16 where pupils are fully involved in setting and reviewing personal targets. Good quality records provide evidence of pupils' achievements and include photographs, which make them meaningful to pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good range of learning experiences that meets pupils' needs well. The curriculum is carefully monitored to ensure that it includes the National Curriculum. The school supplements well what it can provide on site by linking with special and mainstream schools and colleges.

The curriculum supports pupils' personal development well. There is a broad programme of PSHCE that reflects the school's high expectations of pupils. Regular excursions into the local community to enable pupils to socialise and practise their communication skills are a particular strength. Similarly, there is a wide range of enterprise activities for pupils of all ages. For instance, the youngest shred paper and sell this as pet bedding, whilst the older ones run a thriving business selling hot breakfast rolls to staff and visitors. For those pupils who have residential provision, the curriculum provides high quality enrichment and supports well the development of independence skills.

The post-16 curriculum is satisfactory. Staff work hard to offset the limitations imposed by the building, which is a cramped bungalow. They link successfully with colleges and community organisations to provide good vocational options and work experience. Suitable, ambitious plans for future development are limited by a lack of certainty about the future of the provision and the scarcity of funding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

A strong ethos of care, concern and respect for the individual underpins everything that this school does in its work with pupils and with families. The school is vigilant in ensuring that pupils feel safe and are kept safe and that families and others too have confidence in this. It knows its pupils well and has detailed systems for tracking progress. It works very well with other agencies and families to ensure that all understand what pupils can do, need to learn and what will be put into place to help them achieve this. This ensures everyone's contribution is valued and maximised and supports achievement and pupils' future needs very well indeed. Parents feel hugely supported by this school and feel it helps them to deal more effectively with their child's needs at home as well as helping their child to learn at school. Staff are tenacious in trying to identify pupils' wishes and views and there has been real progress in involving pupils in simple decision making about options and programmes. However, more could be done to involve pupils in setting targets and understanding them.

Child protection and health and safety measures are good. All procedures are in place to safeguard pupils and these meet government requirements. Some elements of health and safety are exceptional. For example, during the current building work, contractors were given training as to how pupils might be disturbed by certain events and noises. As a result, they immediately changed the timing of certain activities to minimise distress to pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads and manages the school and its outreach activities well. He has a very clear vision and high aspirations for all of the school's work. He has built a strong and expert team around him who are determined to extend inclusive opportunities for pupils and to provide them with the skills and knowledge that will set them up for lifelong learning and a good quality of life. They are succeeding well in this despite financial constraints. This is a school that reflects well on what it does and analyses its results and other data well. It uses this information to challenge itself to do better and is involved in many regional and local initiatives to support school development and provision. There are similar strengths in the ways that it manages its high quality outreach provision. However, although there have been improvements in the way subjects are led since the last inspection, some subject leaders are not yet fully involved in the monitoring of their subjects.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors are extremely supportive and knowledgeable and are strong advocates for the school. They contribute very well to the monitoring of the school's work. However, the school has a considerable budgetary deficit. Although it is approved by the local authority, there is no agreed recovery plan in place. This limits development and leaves some of the existing work vulnerable. For example, some college links are provided in return for training of college staff; however, this arrangement is not secure in the long term.

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Inspection judgements

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| 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

| | |
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| 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? | 2 |
| The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | NA |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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 | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 1 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| 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? | 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

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| 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 | 3 |
| 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

2 February 2007

Dear Pupils

Holbrook Centre for Autism, Portway, Holbrook, Derbyshire, DE56 0TE

Thank you for making us welcome at your school. We came to see how well you are all getting on and find out what could make your school better.

We enjoyed our visit. Your school is a good school. Your parents are very pleased with the school. They say that it helps you and your families and everyone works together very well so that you can do your best and feel safe. That is good, because it is what Mr Heald wants the school to be good at. People at your school work hard with lots of other people to make sure that you get the help you need.

You are all getting on well with your work at school. You behave excellently and are getting better at choosing what you want to do and at doing things for yourself. This is because your teachers and teaching assistants and others who help you in the school are doing a good job. You also have enjoyable lessons, lots of visits out and very good things to do in the evenings when you stay in residence. The people at school and in residence take good care of you too.

We have asked Mr Heald and the staff to do two main things to make the school better. They have agreed to find ways of making the bungalow a better place for learning for post-16 students. They are also going to make sure that there is enough money for the school to make things even better in the future.

I hope that you will all keep up the good work.

Mrs Sue Lewis

Lead inspector