



The Wyvern School (Buxford)

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131748
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 293836
Inspection dates 25–26 January 2007
Reporting inspector Rowena Onions

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Great Chart Bypass
School category	Community		Ashford
Age range of pupils	3–19		TN23 4ER
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01233 621302
Number on roll (school)	106	Fax number	01233 621302
Number on roll (6th form)	17		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Bill Miller
		Headteacher	David Spencer
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2001		

Age group 3–19	Inspection dates 25–26 January 2007	Inspection number 293836
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Wyvern is a community special school that provides for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities. Because of their difficulties, pupils enter the school with attainment well below that normally expected for their age group. Over recent years, there has been a significant shift in the group of pupils for whom it caters. In the past, the school took a number of pupils with moderate learning difficulties and there are still a small number of older pupils who fit into this category. In the main, however, the school now takes pupils with severe, complex or profound learning difficulties. The school takes pupils from the age of 3. Most children enter the school in the Nursery or Reception class, but a number join from mainstream schools later in their school career, particularly into Year 7. The majority of pupils stay on into the sixth form and leave when they are aged 18 or 19. Most pupils come from the local area of Ashford and its surrounding villages. Almost all of the pupils are of White British heritage and the vast majority (98%) have English as their first language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Wyvern is a good school with some outstanding features. Strong leadership by the headteacher and heads of education of the primary and secondary departments has produced a school whose self-evaluation is good and seeks to continually improve. Although, due to their learning difficulties and disabilities, the standards reached by the pupils are well below national averages, achievement is good overall and the achievement of those in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. Pupils make good strides in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, and also in subjects such as art and physical education. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. A mix of outstanding personal care, very skilful management of pupils in class, a wide curriculum and an ethos which encourages all pupils to consider others, to be proud of what they do and to enjoy their time in school, very successfully combines to achieve this. Care, support and guidance are good overall. Pupils are helped to be self-confident and happy, a situation that parents greatly appreciate and acknowledge is due to the work of staff. In the words of one parent, 'We feel the staff are celebrating with us every step of the way.' Staff are very good at giving more articulate pupils an opportunity to discuss their work and achievements but there is a need to increase these opportunities for those who have more difficulties with communication.

Pupils are well taught. Lessons are stimulating and conducted in a calm, effective way. Teachers and teaching assistants work hard to provide for the often wide range of need within their classes, but in some lessons, this could be more effectively achieved. The overall curriculum is good. The programmes of work planned for the youngest pupils in the school are particularly strong. An outstanding feature of the curriculum is the opportunity many pupils have to work with their peers in mainstream schools, colleges and work placements. There are not, however, sufficient curricular opportunities to enable pupils who communicate non-verbally to learn how to make a full contribution to the community in which they live and work.

Leadership and management are good overall. Robust systems have been set up to track and evaluate the progress of individuals and groups and to link this with the quality of teaching and learning. Actions taken as a result have successfully promoted overall school improvement. Despite the difficulties of having a school on two sites, there is an ethos of teamwork that is very beneficial. A number of staff have developed particular expertise and all are willing to learn from others. This expertise has been utilised to good effect in the past but could be even further exploited. Governors are full members of the school team and play an effective role in the running of the school.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the provision for pupils in Years 12, 13 and 14 is good. The curriculum they are offered is strong and very responsive to their individual needs. Thus, they are helped to fulfil their potential and to make a smooth transfer to the world beyond school. The school is justly proud of the very positive feedback it receives

about the successes of past pupils. The frequent opportunities for experiencing life outside the school setting and the emphasis on the development of independence are already instrumental in promoting these successes but are currently the focus of further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make full use of staff expertise to further develop:
- consistency in ensuring that pupils' individual learning needs are met in each lesson
- opportunities for all pupils, irrespective of their mode or level of communication, to express their opinion about their work and about their life in school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

As a result of the good provision, pupils' achievement is good overall, irrespective of their special educational needs, although standards are well below average. The school uses a wide range of data, both produced internally and from externally accredited sources, to demonstrate this. Pupils make good progress through the 'p' scales and overall, data shows that their progress is better than that seen in similar schools. This data shows that pupils are making increasingly good progress year on year. This is as a result of increasingly effective monitoring and evaluation leading to improvements in provision.

Pupils in the Foundation Stage show outstanding progress against the criteria in the Foundation Stage curriculum, with particular strengths in their personal, social, emotional and physical development. Progress in the sixth form is good, with pupils, along with those in Key Stage 4, attaining a range of nationally accredited awards, including, for example, Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and GCSE art.

Pupils gradually gain literacy and numeracy skills at a level appropriate to their capabilities and starting points. Pupils make good progress against the challenging targets set for them in their individual education plans, demonstrating very strong all-round personal as well as academic achievement. The school's wide curriculum ensures that pupils make good progress in a number of other subjects, with particular strengths in art and physical education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils are happy, friendly and secure. This is a particular strength throughout the school but is particularly of note at points of entry to the school. Pupils who enter the

school into the Nursery and Reception classes and those who enter from other schools, for example, in Year 7, settle very well and quickly gain or regain self-confidence.

Pupils generally work hard in class, often to gain the freely given praise of teachers and teaching assistants, but as they mature, because they have a pride in what they are able to do. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils show great care and concern for others. A discussion in the school council, for example, centred around the needs of wheelchair-bound pupils during a cold period of weather. There is an increasing understanding of right and wrong and a will to live by the school code. Pupils' cultural development is enhanced both by their understanding of the lifestyles of others and by them gaining a wider knowledge of art and music.

Behaviour is outstandingly good. Pupils are biddable and treat others with a level of respect that they in part gain from the example set for them by staff. Those with particular behavioural difficulties are very successfully helped to develop better skills. Overall, the school is an ordered and orderly community with a warm personal ethos that is a major factor in enabling pupils to blossom. Through a combination of many factors in the extensive school provision, pupils gain deeper understanding of how to keep themselves happy, healthy and safe.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. There are examples of outstanding practice in the Foundation Stage and in some other classes throughout the school, but there are also some examples of satisfactory teaching. All teachers plan lessons that motivate pupils to learn, drawing upon their experiences to make lessons relevant. Most lessons are lively and very good efforts are made to ensure that all pupils feel part of the class group. Teaching assistants play a valuable role in this and their very good skills are used well to this effect. Management of pupils is very good and lessons are conducted in a friendly, calm atmosphere that helps pupils to relax and to learn.

The school has very comprehensive systems for assessing pupils' skills and abilities. In much of the teaching, this information is used well and pupils' learning is enhanced by the very skilled way in which teachers plan to meet the needs of each individual pupil while maintaining a clear class focus, and in the way in which they use staff and resources to guide pupils' learning. Learning is only satisfactory when this match of learning to individual pupils' needs is not as precise. Pupils with more developed verbal communication skills are actively encouraged in lessons to understand and comment on their own learning and this greatly assists them to gain self-confidence as well as to help them to improve. Although there are a number of examples of the extension of this effective practice to non-verbal pupils, overall, there is a lack of consistency in this area.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. The wide diversity of pupils' needs is carefully considered when programmes of work are set each year. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, for example, alters year on year, allowing pupils to follow courses such as entry level courses or ASDAN, according to their capabilities. The curriculum is sensitive to the differing needs of pupils, providing, for example, sensory experiences, hydro or speech therapy where needed. There is not a sufficient breadth of opportunities across the curriculum to allow pupils whose mode of communication is largely non-verbal to learn to express their opinions and to take decisions.

An outstanding aspect of the curriculum is the way the school works in conjunction with mainstream schools and colleges to enable pupils (currently 40%) from Wyvern to work on a regular basis with their peers. This has a particularly good impact on their social development as well as helping them to make academic progress. Similarly, the work that is done to promote progress of pupils on the roll of mainstream schools by including them in work at Wyvern is very effective.

There are many activities planned to help pupils mature personally and emotionally in the personal, social and health education curriculum, through many subjects and through enrichment activities. These range from clubs, some of which are run by older pupils, to educational and residential visits. Visitors, for example, the community police, further extend the curriculum, enabling pupils to gain a wider understanding of the world in which they live.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall, but the personal care that is given to pupils is outstanding. The school centres on the individual needs of each pupil and works very effectively to promote the social, emotional and personal welfare of all. This emphasis makes a significant contribution to pupils' outstanding personal development. The school works very closely with outside agencies to provide for the all-round needs of each pupil. The safety of pupils is taken very seriously and all staff are very well trained in ensuring this. Academic guidance for the large majority of pupils is also strong, but needs strengthening for those who do not communicate verbally. There is a particular strength in the way pupils in the sixth form are helped to prepare themselves for life after they leave school. The success of this is evident in the very successful transfer they make into work, college or other placements. Parents are very positive about the way their children are provided for and many comment on the very significant role in their child's life and development played by staff in the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The overall leadership and management of the school are good, and some aspects are outstanding. The very strong leadership of the headteacher and the heads of education for the two sites has built a very strong staff team. Despite the difficulties of working on two sites, staff work together very well. Whole-school improvements, such as those in physical education, have utilised the expertise of individual teachers to train others and this has very successfully promoted achievement. The senior team is very aware of the skills of particular staff, for example, expertise in extending provision for non-verbal pupils, although these skills could be used even more extensively. Outstanding leadership of the Foundation Stage has built provision that is not only of significant benefit to pupils in the school, but is a substantial asset to local schools and nurseries. This strong link with other schools is greatly valued by those who receive support and advice from Wyvern staff. The school is aware that the role of key stage managers is not yet as developed as it could be. At present, these managers run their own departments well but there is a need to extend their role so they play a greater part in whole-school evaluation and improvement.

Monitoring and evaluation are strengths. Exemplary systems have been set up for checking the school's work and its impact on pupils' achievement. These relatively new systems are increasingly enabling staff to be able to celebrate their successes as well as work to improve provision. Work to make improvements is well judged and improving achievement indicates its success and shows that the school has good capacity for further improvement. Governors play a full part in school evaluation and improvement. They have been instrumental, alongside the staff and school bursar, in ensuring that money is spent wisely. Accommodation and resources are of high quality and used well. The school provides good value for money.

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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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	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	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	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?	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?	2	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	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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

Mrs Duffy and I really enjoyed our time at your school and would like to thank you for the friendly way you greeted us. Like you, we think yours is a good school.

Here are some of the things we like best:

- The way you all get on so well together and enjoy your time in school.
- The way you become more and more self-confident.
- That you are taught well and this helps you to learn and to make good progress.
- The range of interesting activities provided for you.
- The opportunities many of you have to work with friends in other schools and colleges.
- That the adults help and look after you very well, so you always have someone to turn to for help.
- We think your headteacher is very good at getting everybody to work together as a team.

To make things even better, this is what we have asked your school to do now:

- Make sure that in all of your lessons you are each given things to learn and work to do that will help you to make even better progress.
- See what your teachers can do to help those of you who communicate in ways other than by talking, to give your opinions about your work and about your school.

Once again, thank you. We know that you will carry on enjoying being at your school.