



Wargrave House School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134888
Local Authority St. Helens
Inspection number 296303
Inspection dates 14–15 December 2006
Reporting inspector Susan Preece HMI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	449 Wargrave Road
School category	Non-maintained special		Newton-le-Willows
Age range of pupils	5–19		Merseyside WA12 8RS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01925 224899
Number on roll (school)	70	Fax number	01925 291368
Number on roll (6th form)	21		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Dr Stuart Talbot
		Headteacher	Mrs W Mann
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group 5–19	Inspection dates 14–15 December 2006	Inspection number 296303
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Wargrave House is a non-maintained special school for children who have autistic spectrum disorders. The school provides a total communication environment and all pupils have a statement of special educational need. Twenty one pupils board at the school from Monday to Friday including those who regularly receive respite care. There are three times as many boys than girls. Ten pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Pupils come from across the town and from 16 other local authorities. The school, which was granted status as a registered charity in 2004, is operated and managed by a board of trustees. The board has delegated powers for the day-to-day management of the school to the governing body, which reports to the trustees on a regular basis.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school's view that this is an outstanding school; it is very successful in providing a total communication environment and the consistency of practice which is needed to enable pupils with autistic spectrum disorders to be more confident and enthusiastic learners. Pupils make excellent progress. A culture of success, where the achievements of all pupils are celebrated, permeates the ethos of the school. All pupils are well cared for, motivated to work hard and enjoy their time at school. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and some is outstanding. The high standard of innovative autism-specific practice has been maintained and developed over time. Self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement has been effective in driving it forwards. The school has rightly identified the need to develop further the process of setting whole-school targets and ensuring that all lessons match teaching to pupils' individual needs.

The way staff manage behaviour is outstanding. Behavioural techniques are underpinned by rigorous support programmes, methodology from training and education of autistic children with related communication handicaps (TEACCH), picture exchange communication system (PECS), relaxation and sensory approaches. Collective application of these techniques ensures a sensitive, responsive and organised approach to managing behaviour. Communication arrangements with parents are extremely well considered and much positive comment is regularly received.

There are strong links with local schools and colleges. The outstanding curriculum responds to pupils' individual needs, successfully supporting their learning and excellent personal development. Parents express great confidence in the school. 'My son loves school and feels safe and secure there. All the staff help him to cope with everyday life which is so difficult for him.'

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The post-16 provision is outstanding and, as with the rest of the school, has a well established culture of continuous improvement. Students make excellent progress across all areas of their development with gains in work-related learning that contribute to preparing them well for when they leave school. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The curriculum is good and shows a progression from what younger pupils are learning as they approach adulthood and greater independence. The school successfully celebrates all achievements, and effective individual education plans are in place to direct what students will do after leaving school. Leadership and management are outstanding and there is a clear view about how to improve the provision further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 8

The Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) conducted a separate inspection of boarding provision in January 2006 and found it to be a model of good care practice. The school has successfully addressed issues raised at the last CSCI inspection concerning a new play area and kitchen facilities. Staff training now includes an increased focus on sensory awareness and improved opportunities for senior care staff to gain additional qualifications beyond NVQ Level 3. The residential provision makes a very good contribution to pupils' welfare and education. Excellent communication with parents and very good liaison between care staff and school staff are strengths of the provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop the process of developing whole-school targets.
- Ensure that all lessons match teaching to pupils' individual needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school's self-evaluation underestimates the progress pupils make; inspectors judged it to be outstanding. Given their abilities and starting points pupils make excellent progress in developing social and communication skills and achieve well academically. This is the result of the 'total communication' approach used by all staff. Pupils flourish in the positive climate for learning provided by the school. There are no significant differences in the progress made by different groups of pupils.

The school makes very good use of a range of data from a variety of sources, including careful examination of speech and language outcomes to inform planning, teaching and learning. Challenging targets are set for each pupil in all areas and these are regularly and rigorously reviewed. Results in the few GCSE examinations taken in 2006 were good; successes included passes in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils also gained entry level certificates and life skills awards. The high quality residential provision makes a significant contribution to the achievement of the pupils and this is a direct result of clear and well understood routines together with a consistent approach all of which is underpinned by the total communication environment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their attendance is very good and they show a strong desire to learn and succeed. In the context of the school, behaviour is very good. Consistent routines and very good communication between staff mean that any instances of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with very effectively. There are outstanding relationships between pupils and school staff. This results in the vast majority of pupils showing respect and consideration for others. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. The school works very hard with all pupils to help them develop an understanding of autistic spectrum disorders and this supports their emotional well-being. There are themed weeks in the school that focus on different aspects of culture and religion and this helps pupils to develop their understanding of these areas successfully. Pupils understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and have a high awareness of the importance of keeping safe. They learn how to make healthy dietary choices through having access to a range of healthy food, including fresh fruit, and to fresh drinking water. Many pupils enjoy taking part in a range of sporting extra-curricular activities, such as boccia and jogging clubs. Pupils play an active role in the school community, for example as members of the school council, or through clubs and societies. They are also involved in the wider community through work-related learning and links to other schools and colleges. Their success in developing their communication skills, teamwork and self-confidence prepares them very well for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school accurately identifies teaching and learning as good. The development of communication skills is strongly reinforced in all lessons with a wide range of strategies used to support this development. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, give clear instructions and constantly check that pupils have understood what they are meant to be doing. There is very good and appropriate use of praise for small steps of success. Successful multidisciplinary teamwork between teachers, assistants and care staff supports the learning of all pupils. Staff have detailed knowledge about individual pupils and use this information to plan well. The result is that difficult situations are avoided. In most lessons, the individual needs of pupils are met by the use of different tasks, skilled support and appropriate levels of language, which leads to very good progress being made. However, in a small minority of lessons the activities are not sufficiently well matched to pupils' individual needs.

There is good use of ICT in lessons to support and extend learning. Digital cameras are used successfully to record progress and help pupils in developing their communication skills and evaluating their progress. Assessment is given a very strong focus and all pupils have a baseline assessment on entry which leads to challenging targets being set for all areas of development. Progress is reviewed on a regular basis and targets are adapted to take account of the progress pupils have made. Pupils are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Information relating to progress is thoroughly analysed on an individual and cohort basis and used to inform future developments for pupils and subject areas.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school accurately identifies that there is an outstanding range of subjects and programmes to meet pupils' needs. The post-16 curriculum is being further reviewed so that it can provide a better match for students' increasingly complex individual needs. All pupils follow a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum which effectively incorporates all National Curriculum subjects. Pupils start each morning with a 'calm and relax' session which helps them to prepare for the day ahead. Pupils are successfully encouraged to reflect on their own learning through visually structured comment sheets. At Key Stage 4 there are additional opportunities to personalise the curriculum according to interest through option routes. The school has successfully identified communication and personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) as priority areas for each pupil. The use of local facilities and the community, especially for the post-16 students, is very good and used effectively to support and extend the social and educational experiences of all pupils. Where appropriate, the school offers a suitable range of national awards to celebrate successes from entry level certificates to GCSE, sometimes in collaboration with a local high school. All pupils are involved in recognising and celebrating their success and, as result, the majority of pupils make excellent progress according to their levels of ability and aptitude.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of care is excellent throughout the school, with the 'whole-school approach' to all aspects of the pupils' development supporting their progress. The monitoring of pupils' progress through targets in their individual education plans, learning outcomes and communication strategies is well documented. This allows progress against targets to be recorded, measured and used to inform planning for future progress. Pupils work in a safe and very attractive environment, which helps them to focus well on learning. There are detailed risk assessments for all individuals, which are then linked to activities to ensure pupils' safety. There are very effective communications between all areas in the school and to relevant support agencies. The family support worker ensures very effective links between the school and the home,

and parents are extremely positive about the school and speak with pride of their children's progress. As one parent says, 'The care and support that our son gets at school helps us so much as a family to cope.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management of the school are outstanding. Excellent attention is given to achieving and maintaining high standards and consistency throughout all aspects of the school's work. The very high quality speech and language therapy support and skilled interventions play a vital role in this work. Since taking up her post just over a year ago the principal and her senior leadership team have established a rigorous culture of self-review and continuous improvement. This is built upon a collaborative and multidisciplinary team approach to developing and valuing each person's expertise.

Senior managers routinely monitor the quality of provision and provide constructive and supportive feedback. This encourages staff to reflect on their practice and to keep a vision for further improvement. Subject coordinators have clear responsibilities and accountability for their areas and suitable plans are in place for them to monitor their subjects across classes and develop co-teaching approaches. This is a school which knows its strengths and what it needs to do to improve further. Managers are routinely collating data about pupils' attainment and encouraging teachers to use this more effectively. The school is aware of the need to extend this good practice to setting challenging whole-school targets. There are rigorous procedures in place to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils and staff and to gather the views of families, pupils and staff.

The recently established governing body is developing a good understanding of the pupils' complex needs, takes its responsibilities seriously and keeps up to date with regular training. Communication throughout the school and with families is very good. The school has made excellent progress since the last inspection and has maintained and developed its high standards. It is extremely well placed to continue to improve. High value is placed on training and all staff have access to rigorous induction and appraisal processes. The school is extremely well presented with high standards of accommodation. Value for money is excellent.

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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 effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
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	1	
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	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	2	
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	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

As you know we recently visited your school to find out how well you are doing. We really enjoyed our visit and learned a lot about your school. I particularly liked having my lunch with you and watching the lower school's Christmas performance.

These are just some of the things we found about your school.

- When you arrive at the school the staff do a tremendous amount to help you settle in and identify what you need to learn. What is really good is that so many of you make fantastic progress in your social and communication skills because of the help you receive from staff and especially from the speech and language therapists.
- Every school needs a leader and we think that you have a very special one in your Principal. The leadership team, staff and governors are guiding and supporting you very well but we have asked them to set whole-school targets to help you learn even better.
- We asked your parents and carers for their views of your school. They have great confidence in the work of the school in caring for you and leading you to success.
- The building and accommodation are really good.
- You try hard with your behaviour and we were impressed by the way you help your friends to stay calm and stick at what they need to do.
- You are taught well and we have asked that your teachers match your learning more sharply to your needs to help you to achieve even more.

You are rightly proud of your excellent school and I wish you lots of success for all that you do in the future.