

Horizon School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100311
Local Authority	Hackney
Inspection number	307353
Inspection dates	10–11 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	72
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tim O'Brien
Headteacher	Miss Anne Uhart
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	Wordsworth Road London N16 8BZ
Telephone number	020 7254 8096
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Horizon School caters for students who have mixed special needs. Until 2006, the great majority of students had moderate learning difficulties (MLD), but over the past 18 months, most new admissions have severe learning difficulties (SLD) and complex needs, including an increasing number with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Currently, 50% of students have MLD, 22% have ASD, 14% have SLD, and 11% experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). Attainment on entry is low. Six students with the most challenging ASD are taught in a separate, specialist base group with a very high staff ratio. Students come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. This reflects the local area, which is also considered to be one of high social deprivation. Most transfer into Horizon from the feeder primary special school and local mainstream schools. The school has received the following awards: Investor in People (2005), Healthy Schools (2004/2007) and Sportsmark (2007). The local authority (LA) has plans to amalgamate the school with two others on a new site within the next five years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Horizon provides well for the majority of its students, and parents are happy with the school. However, it has not yet developed its educational provision sufficiently to ensure that those with the most complex needs achieve enough. It is currently in the process of doing so. This period of transition is having an adverse effect on the school's overall effectiveness, which was judged to be good at the time of the 2004 inspection. Teaching, learning, students' achievement, the curriculum and overall effectiveness are all now satisfactory. Nevertheless, the school continues to provide well for the students who have MLD. Teaching for these students is consistently good, and the curriculum is relevant to their interests and aptitudes. They make good progress from their starting points, as demonstrated by their Year 11 public examination results. The standards attained, understandably, are below expectations for their age. Provision for the students with BESD, and for those with ASD both in the special base group and in the main classes, is generally effective. However, sometimes teachers do not match work accurately to these individuals' needs, or use the right strategies to make sure they stay engaged with the work.

Educational provision for the students with SLD, with and without additional needs, is weaker, although adequate overall. The students generally make satisfactory progress due to the individual support they receive but the school does not yet have effective systems in place to assure their learning. The assessment system is not fine-tuned enough to track students' small steps of progress effectively. The curriculum is not yet fully adapted to students' needs, for example, it sometimes focuses too much on theoretical concepts without enough practical activities to support understanding. Teaching does not always take enough account of individuals' difficulties, for example with communication, perception and reading. Finally, curriculum resources do not support the students' learning sufficiently.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. As a result of honest self-evaluation, the senior staff are fully aware of the school's shortcomings and are keen to make the necessary improvements. They acknowledge that the impact of some policies and practices has not been monitored, and that performance data has not been effectively used to set challenging targets and underpin school improvement. The managers have sought external support to make sure that their planned developments are relevant, robust and sustained. These are detailed in a school improvement plan that is closely followed. The school has turned the corner and its capacity for further improvement is satisfactory. However, it has been slow to reach this point, partly due to staff anxieties, partly to uncertainties about the school's future, and partly because suitable plans to bring about change had not been made. The governing body, although supportive, has not carried out its duties of providing constructive challenge and monitoring the work of the school. This, too, hindered the process of development.

The staff show outstanding care and support for students' personal well-being. This aspect is a strength of the school and reflected in students' good personal development. Their behaviour, spiritual, moral and social development are good, and their attendance is satisfactory and improving. Staff are alert to the individual needs and circumstances of the students. This concern is demonstrated by the high number of referrals for help and support made to external professionals on behalf of students in need. Students say they are happy to turn to staff if they are distressed or worried, and the school makes a good contribution to their capacity to stay safe. The students' enjoyment of school, the degree to which they make healthy choices and

their cultural development are outstanding. They leave the school well prepared for their future lives as young adults, and ready to take part in, and give back to their communities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the work of the governing body, leaders and managers so that all aspects of the school's work are regularly monitored, evaluated and developed.
- Develop and implement a robust system for tracking and assessing students' attainment and progress, and use the information to inform planning for school improvement.
- Improve the achievement of students with severe learning difficulties by improving teaching, the curriculum and resources, and the use of assessment to underpin planning for learning.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged 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

Higher attaining students achieve well in relation to their starting points and capabilities due to the good quality provision that the school has traditionally made for them. To date, students have achieved at least three Entry level certificate awards at the end of Year 11, and some receive as many as eight. The achievement of students with severe learning difficulties is satisfactory because the school has not yet finished developing its educational provision to fully meet their needs. Their progress is particularly affected by the lack of a suitable system to assess and track their developing skills, and so inform careful planning for learning. All students make good progress in religious education, personal, social, health and citizenship education, sport and the arts because of the school's emphasis and expertise in these areas. Students compete successfully at local and national levels in sporting events, and are clear that they enjoy sport very much. The quality of some art work, such as sea scenes to illustrate the contrast between light and dark, is outstanding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The students' good personal development, and the calm, productive atmosphere found in most classes, including the ASD base group, is the result of good quality provision for this aspect. The great majority of students feel safe at school and know how to make safe and healthy lifestyle choices. They are clear that bullying is decreasing because it is dealt with promptly and effectively. Attendance is improving, and almost all students enjoy school and are keen to attend and stay in lessons. This is often a significant improvement on their attendance in previous schools. The students develop self-awareness and learn to manage their own behaviour effectively. They respond well to the behaviour management system, and the higher attaining students are very enthusiastic about the school's 'golden award' and points systems. Two students said quite openly that they used to be cheeky and disruptive, but that they are much better now because the school had helped them. The students' moral and social development and their ability to give back to the school and wider community are good. They accept responsibility and are generally considerate towards one another. They work well together, are happy to express their opinions, and take their responsibilities as school councillors seriously. The students' cultural development is outstanding. They understand and value each other's heritages and enjoy cultural expression in drama, art and music. The students enjoy taking part

in community-based activities, for example, working on film-making with the BBC and entering sporting competitions. Overall, their rounded personal development is a good basis for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

All students enjoy their lessons and are happy to say so. Parents' questionnaires confirm this and show that they are pleased with their children's progress. The quality of teaching for the higher attaining students is good. The best teaching is lively, interesting, links clearly to previous work, supports students' personal development, and challenges their thinking very effectively. However, these good teaching skills are not always adapted sufficiently well to incorporate the subject matter and strategies required to meet the needs of students with SLD. For example, there is sometimes too much use of writing on the board, which some students can neither see nor read. Some staff use signing effectively to support communication, but pictures and symbols to aid communication and learning are not used enough. In practice, the staff usually provide additional support, such as talking through work so students with limited reading skills can understand. Teaching assistants do this very well. However, it is not part of systematic planning to assure learning for this group of students with complex needs, and this aspect of teaching is weak.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is well established and meets the needs of higher attaining students effectively. It contributes well to their good achievement and future life prospects. Work has begun to adapt the curriculum for lower attaining students. Some good units of work have been introduced, for example in science. Staff have started to work on alternative ways of accrediting the older students' work, and are developing a more topic-based approach to the curriculum. Currently, however, there are insufficient resources to support a more practical curriculum in most subjects, and particularly to diversify communication away from just the spoken and written word. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used well enough to support learning in any student group. Very good consideration is given to promoting the students' personal development through a number of subjects such as citizenship, religious education and work-related learning. The curriculum is enriched very effectively by a variety of partnerships and activities, such as strong links with colleges and sporting and cultural establishments. The students very much enjoy the wide range of lunchtime and after school clubs, which they choose on a daily basis.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school makes a good contribution to the students' capacity to stay safe and healthy, through direct action and its supportive ethos. Safeguarding students' welfare is well established, and the school has a range of sound policies and practices in place. Appropriate checks have been made on staff, including those to assure their suitability to work with children. However, these checks are not all kept in a single central record as required. Health and safety is generally well attended to, and appropriate risk assessments are made as necessary. The termly risk

assessments of students in the ASD base contribute very effectively to evidence of consistent improvement in their challenging behaviour. Attendance is improving as a result of the school's good work with students, parents and the LA, and the school has good partnerships with a wide range of external professionals and agencies. Higher attaining students receive good academic support and guidance which contributes to their good achievement. However, the lack of a suitable system to assess and track the attainment and progress of lower attaining students means that systematic planning for their learning through target setting is less effective. The targets set on students' individual education plans (IEPs) are very variable. Some are good, while others are too broad to be helpful.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has experienced two considerable challenges in the last eighteen months. It faces an amalgamation at an undetermined time in the future, and its student group is rapidly changing. The managers took too long to implement changes to address these challenges, which had an adverse effect on the stability and effectiveness of the school. The governing body, in particular, did not support the school by carrying out its duties sufficiently well. However, in recent months this situation has much improved. The school has accurately identified its strengths and weaknesses, a clear strategy for improvement has been set and staff morale has been raised. The school is appropriately focused on teaching and learning, and good plans are underway to improve both. They are underpinned by curriculum development and staff training, the implementation of a new assessment system, and refreshed performance management that is linked with school priorities and students' achievement. This is an improvement as there had been insufficient focus on systematically evaluating the impact of the school's provision. Alongside this, there has been inadequate use of challenging targets to raise standards because the school has not had the appropriate tools in place to be able to set them. Both these aspects are now being addressed. The staff are committed to the proposed change and keen to develop the school's provision for the new student group. However, the responsibility for this is currently held by the senior staff, and most others do not yet have a sufficiently active role in the school's strategic development.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
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

25 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Horizon School, London, N16 8BZ

Thank you for welcoming me into school last week, and particularly for letting me sit in on your lessons. I would like to say a special thank you to the school council. Your comments were very helpful to the inspection. I learned that all students like school very much, particularly the sporting activities and clubs. You also value the help that the staff give you, for example with reading. A number of your parents answered the inspection questionnaire, and I am pleased to say that they are happy with the school too.

I came to Horizon School to see how it was working and how well you were all doing. Overall, I think that the school is providing you with a satisfactory level of education and care. I found that the school is particularly good at helping you mature and become prepared for your adult lives. Some of you told me that you think your behaviour has improved as a result of the school's support. This is very good news. I also found that the teaching, curriculum and support you receive help most of you to make good progress and get good results at the end of Year 11. The school staff care very much about each student's well-being, and this helps you feel happy and safe at school. However, I think the school needs to do more to help those of you who find learning more difficult. I have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to make some improvements to achieve this. These are:

- to keep a closer eye on the quality of the school's work, and continually check that it is as good as it could be
- to develop a better system for tracking your progress, so that they can use the information to improve the school's work
- to help those of you who find learning difficult by improving the teaching, curriculum, resources and planning for learning for that group of students.

I wish you all the best for your future.

Yours faithfully

Judith Charlesworth

Lead Inspector