

# Alexandra School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	102262
<b>Local Authority</b>	Harrow
<b>Inspection number</b>	307949
<b>Inspection date</b>	14 July 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sheila Nolan

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–12
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	115
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Barry Nolan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Dennis Goldthorpe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	20 June 2005
<b>School address</b>	Alexandra Avenue South Harrow Harrow HA2 9DX
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8864 2739
<b>Fax number</b>	020 8864 9336

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<b>Age group</b>	3-12
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- How well the school's leadership has sustained good practice since the last inspection?
- How rapid is the academic and personal progress of the pupils?
- How effectively does the school monitor and evaluate the impact of its work?

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation (SEF), by observing lessons, scrutinising the school's records of pupils' standards and achievement and other documentation, and by discussions with students and staff. Parents' responses to questionnaires also informed judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in the SEF, were other than justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Alexandra School provides education for pupils with a wide range of complex needs. All have a statement of special educational need. The majority of pupils have moderate learning difficulties or an autistic spectrum disorder. Around a fifth has social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Just under half of the pupils are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups but very few are at the early stages of learning English in the main school. The profile of the school population changes every year but boys outnumber girls in most years. Many leave or join the school at other than the customary times. The school has a mainstream nursery with 43 part-time places. Six are allocated to children with complex learning difficulties. There are three pupils in the Reception Year, all with statements of special educational need. Increasing numbers join the nursery with little knowledge of English. The school also provides outreach provision for local schools. Recent awards include Healthy Schools, Artsmark and the Kodak Photographic Award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Alexandra School provides exceptionally well for its vulnerable pupils. It is an outstanding school and very successfully achieves its aim to promote pupils' independence both at school and in the wider world. Parents greatly appreciate the school's work. Echoing the opinions of many, one commented that 'It is a fantastic school and my child has come on in leaps and bounds'. This view endorses the school's accurate evaluation of its work.

The school provides very high quality care, guidance and support for its pupils through teachers' in-depth understanding of the needs of individuals and through excellent links with social and other services. As a result, all groups of pupils make rapid progress in their personal development so that by the time they leave, it is good. Those pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties grow significantly in their awareness of the impact of their actions on others. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders improve their communication skills very effectively and form positive relationships among their peers and with adults. As those with moderate learning difficulties gain in confidence, their attitudes to learning grow increasingly positive. Overall behaviour is good. Mostly, pupils manage their feelings and emotions well both in school and on visits. Such improvements represent giant strides for most from their starting points. The 'golden rules' offer pupils clear boundaries and high expectations so that their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is also good.

Alexandra School lays great store in maintaining a secure environment for all groups. It is a very happy place and pupils show real trust in the adults around them. Through a wide range of practical activities, pupils know about healthy living. The allotment, for example, is a clear favourite and involves staff, parents, pupils and visitors. Swimming and yoga are popular as are after-school dance and football. Pupils show an impressive level of commitment to the school. They are really proud of it, of their uniforms and their achievements. As a result, most attend very regularly and enjoy the many stimulating opportunities within the excellent curriculum. Exciting enrichment activities such as the camp week, the visit to France, hat making and 'foods-of-the-world' festivals accustom pupils to the wider community and help them appreciate traditions other than their own. Parents report that because pupils enjoy school so much, they want to attend at weekends. Pupils learn to make a difference to others through their work for the school council, recycling, the wind turbine project and fund-raising for charities. Strong partnerships within the local community, including the police and places of worship, alongside carefully orchestrated enterprise activities in which they apply their basic skills, prepare pupils as well as possible for their future economic well-being.

Although standards are low, pupils achieve exceptionally well from their starting points. They make especially fast progress in science and mathematics because they respond very well to the many practical activities. Pupils were fully engaged in a science lesson in designing a torch with which to read in the dark, for example, and were fully prepared to persevere until they found a solution. The gap in performance between these areas and reading and writing is narrowing fast because of the school's concentrated support for individuals. Many pupils overcome significant difficulties in listening and speaking although progress here is slower than in other areas because of their sometimes very complex needs. The school excels in supporting the areas identified within individual learning plans. Nevertheless, it clearly recognises that its half-termly target-setting covers too long a period and pupils cannot always meet all of their personal and academic targets. Shorter-term targets are required to manage better pupils' unpredictable development.

Outstanding teaching and excellent academic guidance underpin the pupils' success in learning. Teachers not only know each pupil well but also record meticulously each tiny step in understanding. The imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT) coupled with the creative use of resources engages pupils' interest really well. In a literacy lesson, pupils' understanding of words relating to position was improved through lively visual stimuli and dynamic images. Teachers use rewards particularly well to develop good habits and pleasure in learning.

Alexandra School has maintained and improved its good practice noted at the last inspection. This owes much to the clear direction provided by the inspirational leadership of the headteacher over many years. A dedicated senior team and governors support the headteacher untiringly and respond flexibly and imaginatively to challenges and opportunities. The impact of the stable and outstanding leadership and management is seen in the genuine efforts of all staff to follow consistently the school's procedures and policies. Pupils reflect the good models staff provide. Since the last inspection, structures within the school have been re-organised so that responsibilities are spread across the staff. This has resulted in a strong sense of ownership of the school's work. The school is working hard to involve all parents as fully as possible in the life of the school. The recent 'Building on Success' conference involved not only staff and governors but parents, too, in planning the future direction of the school. The ever-changing nature of the school population means the school reflects on its practice very regularly and know clearly where it should improve even further. Self-evaluation is well embedded at all levels of the school and is generally robust and accurate. Governance is excellent. Led by an able chair, governors challenge and support the school very effectively in its drive to be ever better.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 1**

Provision for nursery and reception children is excellent. Many children enter the nursery with well below average literacy rates and often little knowledge of English. Careful observation and planning for their individual needs ensures these children get off to a very good start. Because of the careful balance of activities directed by teachers and those where children make their own choices, they make rapid progress and gain steadily in fluency in English. Most children move on to other institutions after a year in the nursery. Records show that they are on track to be securely within the expected early learning goals, particularly in their social and physical development, in their knowledge of the world and in their creative development. The small number of children who remain into the Reception Year have complex needs and these are very well catered for. They too, make substantial progress, especially in their communication skills.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that pupils' targets are set and evaluated over a shorter period than at present so that they can meet more of their targets.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
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

01 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alexandra School, Harrow, HA2 9DX

Thank you for welcoming me to your school and for sharing not only your ideas but also your musical assembly. I enjoyed your singing, as I saw you did, very much. Thank you, particularly to the school council for sharing their activities with me.

You and your parents are rightly proud of Alexandra school. You all think that it is an excellent school and I agree with you. Your exceptional headteacher, staff and governors want the best for you and are determined that you make as much progress as you can in lessons and in your personal development. Because you enjoy school so much, the vast majority of you attend well, work very hard and make very fast progress.

Staff know you all individually and look after you very well. You told me you feel really comfortable in school and that there is always someone to help you if you are distressed. You try to eat healthily and I was impressed by the guidelines you follow at lunch times. You are confident to express your views but at the same time very ready to listen to others. You understand the importance of helping those outside your community and are ready to support many charities.

When thinking about how it could be even better, your school is very clear that it would like to make it easier for you to reach all of your targets successfully all of the time. To do this, it hopes to set and check targets with you over a shorter time than at present.

I am sure you will continue to do your level best to cooperate with your teachers. They are really proud of you.

I wish you a very happy future at Alexandra.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Nolan

Lead Inspector