

Little Heath School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102878
Local Authority	Redbridge
Inspection number	308146
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	136
6th form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr G Breckill
Headteacher	Mr P Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Hainault Road Little Heath Romford RM6 5RX
Telephone number	020 8599 4864
Fax number	020 8590 8953

Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Little Heath provides for pupils with special learning needs, which range from general learning difficulties to complex autism. Most pupils have general learning difficulties and one third have additional speech and language problems including those with autistic spectrum conditions. There are currently 23 pupils in post 16 provision. A small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. Over half of the pupils are eligible for free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Little Heath provides a good quality of education for all its pupils including the students in post-16 provision. All make excellent progress in their personal development. Parents are pleased for their children to attend the school, knowing that they will be safe and happy and that there are high expectations of their success. One parent's comment was typical: 'My son is extremely happy, many aspects of his life have been broadened.' The school provides a high level of care and support and so pupils feel secure and well supported. They learn how to remain healthy, to keep themselves safe and to take responsibility for their own behaviour. They value the school and this is evident through the very good relationships they have with staff and the good attendance of most of them. Little Heath is remarkable for the warmth and friendliness of the pupils and the caring way in which they look after other pupils with additional learning and social needs. The school has been described by visitors, as having '...moved from a community to a family'.

All the pupils achieve well in their studies, including those from other ethnic groups. The pupils with general learning difficulties make good progress throughout their time at the school. A large minority of these pupils gain GCSE and Entry Level qualifications. The provision for pupils with autism and for those with additional speech and language difficulties is developing more slowly but staff are increasingly successful in helping these pupils to overcome the additional barriers to their learning. As a result, they also achieve well. These pupils make outstanding progress in developing positive attitudes to learning and in their confidence to tackle new work. This underpins their good achievement. Most pupils make good progress in reading due to the effective strategies to accelerate their learning.

Teaching throughout the school is good. Lessons, generally, are interesting and well managed. The pupils enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. However, there are inconsistencies in the assessment and recording of the pupils' small steps in progress. As a result, the effectiveness of educational support and guidance is restricted because learning targets that are meant to help pupils improve their work are not clear or specific enough. This slows down the pace of learning. The pupils follow a good curriculum. The good range of opportunities that they have to interact with the community enriches their learning. The post-16 students are well prepared for moving on to the next stage in their lives. The school has developed good relationships with local colleges and most students, when they leave the school, are able to follow courses in further education. The school has a good reputation locally for the excellent quality of its support for pupils in mainstream schools.

The headteacher's experience and expertise have enabled him to lead the school well. He receives strong and effective support from his deputy. The governors of the school provide a good level of challenge and support to the school's leadership. School leaders evaluate the school's work accurately and are well aware of the strengths in provision and the priorities for further development. For instance, the school has identified that subject leaders and senior staff do not monitor the records of pupils' academic progress often enough. Senior staff are making plans to improve this. The school is well set to build on the good progress made since the last inspection and there is a good capacity to improve provision further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Those students who benefit from continued support stay on and enter the sixth form. They make outstanding progress in their personal development because of excellent procedures to help them gain experiences of adult life. The staff effectively promote an adult ethos and mature behaviour. All students make good progress, although their attainment stays far below that found in mainstream schools. The students achieve well in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. They make good progress in their independence skills and in extending their grasp of work related learning. This adds substantially to their self-confidence. They have a very clear understanding of their own success because they build up impressive records of achievement containing a variety of certificates. These show their achievements in academic learning and in developing personal skills. The curriculum, however, does not always sufficiently allow for all the differing interests and abilities of the students. This can prevent some students from developing their emerging skills even faster. The school has good links with local colleges and the transition arrangements are outstanding. The provision is well managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure consistency in the assessment and recording of pupils' learning, so that teachers are able to write more sharply focused learning targets, which always clearly show pupils how to improve their work.
- Ensure that subject leaders and senior staff regularly monitor the records of the pupils' academic progress to give an up-to-date overview of each pupil's achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils with general learning difficulties experience success in gaining a range of Entry Level qualifications and a few higher achievers are successful in one or more GCSE subjects. This represents good achievement. Their attainment however, remains below that of pupils in mainstream schools. The minority of pupils with additional speech and language difficulties and those with autism also achieve well but because of their learning difficulties, their attainment remains exceptionally low compared to that of mainstream pupils. These pupils, however, make good progress in reading and communication and many achieve success in nationally recognised qualifications in literacy, numeracy and life skills. Although there is no evidence of underachievement by any pupils, including those from minority ethnic groups, the pupils' progress is hindered from being even better by the lack of clarity in their learning targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils' excellent progress in all aspects of personal development reflects the school's strong emphasis on spiritual, moral and social values and pupils demonstrate this through outstanding behaviour. The pupils are considerate to other pupils and staff. For example during the inspection, a distressed boy with autism was seen to be quickly and caringly calmed down by

his friend. Pupils are adamant that there is very little name-calling or intimidation at school. They develop a very good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and of keeping themselves safe. Pupils make a valuable contribution to the well being of everyone at the school through, for example, the flourishing school council. Their good progress in basic skills and in work-related learning means that they are very well prepared for when they leave school.

Pupils know what is expected from them within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere. When pupils' behaviour on some occasions becomes unacceptable, it is dealt with calmly, and with understanding and support for the pupil involved. Parents confirm that their children really enjoy their learning. One parent spoke for many when she wrote, 'My son is extremely happy and contented at the school'. This is reflected in the pupils' good attendance and very good attitudes to learning, both of which have a substantial impact on their achievements. The high number of parents who returned questionnaires consistently praised the school for its positive impact on their children's lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good and this reflects the effective monitoring procedures by senior staff. Teachers and their assistants work in effective teams and they know their pupils' needs very well. Individual pupils receive a high level of support when necessary. As a result, they become much more confident in attempting new things and this has a positive impact on their achievement. Teachers work from clear schemes of work and make good use of national strategies for delivering their subject. This adds rigour to their teaching. Teachers, however, do not always efficiently record each small step in the pupils' progress and consequently their learning targets are less well focused. The pupils like their teachers and the support staff, and so respond well in lessons. The management of behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Pupils understand and respect the clear routines and this assists in keeping a strong focus on learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

There is an appropriate breadth and balance of learning programmes throughout the school because teachers write effective long-term plans. Teachers are making good progress in developing suitably adapted activities for pupils with additional learning difficulties. However, in some lessons, because the pupils' learning targets are not clear enough, the planning is not tailored well enough to meet each pupil's specific curriculum needs. The pupils' enhance their learning well through a range of extra activities. There are frequent visits and events, which support the pupils' understanding of their own and other cultures and teach them that new things can be learned in a variety of situations. This adds considerably to their enjoyment of school. Those with additional difficulties are fully included in activities.

Programmes in personal, social and health education have a significant impact on pupils' improving personal skills. There are well-managed and effective programmes in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Pupils are given good opportunities

to learn about the world of work, including work experience, and to follow courses, which lead to nationally approved qualifications. Good practice ensures that post-16 students experience taster courses at local colleges. This results in students becoming familiar with other places of learning and provides a bridge to further study when they leave school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

There are rigorous safeguarding systems, such as child protection procedures and checks on staff, and these help to ensure the school is a safe and happy place. Extra support is available through the excellent work of the Home and School Development Officer. This work is a strength of the school. The pupils with additional difficulties in communication clearly understand and try to meet targets to improve their behaviour. They make outstanding progress in their personal skills as a result. However, teachers do not generally write the pupils' learning targets with sufficient precision to enable pupils to understand how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The strong leadership of the headteacher and his deputy has enabled the school to continue to move forward since the previous inspection. They have been well supported by senior colleagues and, together, they have successfully led a staff team which helps all students to achieve equally well, and which is committed to seeking improvement. Senior staff evaluate the school's performance effectively. They monitor the pupils' personal development and behaviour targets exceptionally well. Leaders are aware, however, that they do not monitor pupils' academic progress frequently enough to maintain a good overview of their progress. The school's planning appropriately focuses on issues for improving the pupils' performance. Development is planned to ensure that their learning targets are better focused to help them learn more effectively.

Communication within the school is exemplary as a result of the school's innovative use of technology. The high quality of professional training is effectively linked to procedures for managing the performance of teachers and other staff. This has improved the consistency of teaching and the pupils' achievement. Resources are well used and the school gives good value for money. Governors monitor each aspect of the school's performance well. They provide the school with effective challenge and support, which helps the school to continue to raise its standards.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	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	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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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.

Annex A

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

30 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Little Heath School, Romford, RM6 5RX

When I came to your school recently, you made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you in the classrooms and at lunchtime. Thank you for your friendliness and excellent manners and the way you helped me with my work. Yours is a good school and it is obvious that you all enjoy being there because the school does many things well.

- You work hard and make good progress in your work and excellent progress in developing as young people.
- You have a good range of activities, which teach you about the local and other communities.
- Lessons are interesting and you are well taught. This means that you enjoy learning and do your best.
- Older students have good opportunities to visit colleges and prepare yourselves for when you leave school. This will help you to be more confident when you go into new situations.
- All the adults at the school look after you very well.
- The people who run the school do a good job.

There are two main things, which would help the school to improve.

- The staff should record even more carefully everything that you learn. This would help them to give you targets to aim for so that you know exactly what to do to improve your work.
- The senior staff at the school should check, more often, how well you are doing.

You can help too, just by going on working as hard as you have been doing and by continuing to support each other so well.

Yours sincerely,

Mel Blackband

Lead Inspector