

Langley School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103630
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308367
Inspection date	4 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Julia Coop

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lynda Thomas
Headteacher	Fiona Woolford
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2004
School address	Lindridge Road Sutton Coldfield B75 7HU
Telephone number	01213 292929
Fax number	01213 111513

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school caters for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD). Since the previous inspection, an increasing number of pupils on roll have complex learning needs, including severe learning difficulties (SLD) and autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). A few pupils have additional social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. As a result of these learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the pupils are working well below national expectations. An above average proportion of pupils come from homes where English is not their first language. The senior management team has recently been restructured. The deputy headteacher took up post in September 2007, following the appointment of the headteacher in April 2007. The school has gained the Healthy School award, Arts Mark Gold, and nationally recognised awards for emotional literacy and inclusion.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some significant strengths. Parents say it is a 'brilliant school'. A key success is the exceptional level of care, support and guidance that is provided for the pupils. This is because the school puts the pupils at the heart of everything that it does. This is a testament to the effective leadership and management. Typical parent comments such as 'all staff are very patient and approachable, and really help us to deal with any problems' illustrate the way that the parents value the high quality support that is provided for not only their children but also the families.

It is not surprising, therefore, that pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to this happy family-friendly school and make huge progress in their personal development and well-being. This stems principally from the enthusiasm of staff and the extremely supportive atmosphere in which pupils feel very secure. The Pastoral Support Centre, with dedicated staffing, also plays a vital role in helping the one or two pupils who sometimes find it difficult to control their behaviour to develop their own coping strategies. They are helped enormously to become calm again, because of the excellent way that this behaviour is seamlessly managed by all staff. As a result, there is no disruption to learning. The school, therefore, is a calm place where pupils of all abilities and needs make good progress and achieve well overall.

The driving factors in the pupils' success are the good quality of teaching and the curriculum, which successfully encourage pupils to try new experiences and become more independent. In response to the increasingly complex range of pupils' learning needs, the school is modifying the curriculum. In much of the teaching, activities are planned and adapted consistently to aid learning by all groups of pupils. Staff are flexible and willing to try new ideas, especially when planning activities for pupils with more complex needs. However, although they are being well supported, on occasions a few staff lack confidence to move away from more formal teaching methods in some lessons. Consequently, some activities do not always meet the developmental needs of all the pupils. On these occasions, pupils with more complex needs do not make the full amount of progress they could. Planning for children in the Foundation Stage, which the school calls 'lower school' is a particular strength. The skills-based approach to planning is recognised as a model of good practice and the children, especially those with more complex needs, quickly become confident to explore new things and communicate their feelings.

The headteacher has successfully forged the new leadership team into an effective body that monitors and evaluates the school provision well. As a result, the leadership team knows what is working well and where improvement is needed. They have established good assessment procedures to record, monitor and assess the progress of individuals and different groups of pupils. Pupils' individual education plans which focus on overcoming pupils' barriers to learning are a strength. Assessment information is used well to set challenging whole-school and individual targets for pupils. The school acknowledges that assessment information is not used fully to set increasingly challenging targets for the small but increasing number of pupils with more complex learning needs.

The school has a strong commitment to inclusion which has been recognised with an award. As a result, its plans are well advanced to relocate to new purpose-built premises alongside a mainstream school. This exciting development is a testament to the drive, commitment and vision of the headteacher, governors and staff. As a result, they are in a good position to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Staff work together effectively as a team, and have successfully reorganised and adapted the lower school provision to meet the increasingly complex learning needs of the children. The provision of a practical teaching area, access to an exciting outside learning area and another room for more direct and focused teacher-led activities is ensuring children get off to a good start. As a result, children achieve well, whatever their difficulties or disabilities. Children new to English soon learn to communicate in this stimulating learning environment. The children's happy smiling faces when at work with their teacher or exploring different smells, colours and glittery things in water bottles are a testament to the good quality of teaching and learning, very effective curriculum and high quality care they receive. Photographic records of achievement to capture milestones in learning are particularly effective. They are used successfully to plan children's individual learning journeys, especially for pupils with more complex learning needs, and are a model of good practice. However, this is too new to have increased further children's overall level of achievement. The provision is led and managed well and there are very strong links with parents. They are continually kept informed about their children's learning and development so they can work in a very effective partnership with the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all staff have the skills and confidence to be flexible in the way they adapt planning to consistently meet the developmental needs of pupils with more complex learning difficulties.
- Fine-tune the way that assessment information is used in order to set increasingly challenging targets for pupils with more complex learning needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The excellent care and support pupils receive, effective teamwork and good curriculum experiences ensure pupils' achievements are good overall. Children in the lower school make good progress, particularly in their independent, social and communication skills, because of the skill and dedication of the staff. As they move up through the middle and upper school departments, all groups, overall, make good gains in learning. Many pupils with MLD or SLD successfully attend lessons in mainstream school, some making exceptional progress to move onto the higher National Curriculum levels or to transfer successfully back into full-time mainstream education. Pupils with SLD, ASD, those new to English and many pupils with complex learning needs also make good progress in developing their self-awareness and sensory perception, many becoming much more responsive and able to use signing or simple words and sentences to communicate. As one parent commented, her child 'is now talking in full sentences when he couldn't speak at all'. However, this level of progress is not consistent for pupils with complex needs, because some teachers do not ensure that there is a constant focus on developing these pupils' cognitive skills in a developmentally appropriate way.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Parents say that their children really love coming to school and some children are so eager, they even wear their uniform on Sunday. As a result, attendance is good, although some families

take extended holidays. Pupils' great enjoyment of learning is very much in evidence around the school, in lessons and in assembly. Singing is joyful and pupils smile and laugh a lot throughout the school day. Older, more able pupils know they need to look 'left and right' when they cross the road and know they need to go to a sensible adult, such as a police officer, if they get lost or anxious. The need for healthy living is understood very well. The school council have designed healthy menus for the school cook and pupils eat lots of fruit and vegetables. They all work very hard in the 'wake and shake' exercises each morning. All staff provide very clear boundaries; as a result, pupils feel extremely safe and do not get anxious if someone displays challenging behaviour because of their learning disability. The school councillors are very proud of their role in the school and they make an important contribution to school life. They take pride in their additional responsibilities, such as helping in the lower school or ringing the school bell. Pupils look out for each other. They show tolerance and understanding of others so there is an exceptional community spirit and understanding of the wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Throughout the school, teachers and teaching assistants work very well together to support learning and manage any difficult behaviour. All staff have developed very trusting relationships with the pupils. Teachers are encouraging and always celebrate effort and achievement with lots of praise and rewards. This ensures that pupils try hard and really enjoy learning. All staff are very skilled at meeting the needs of pupils with MLD and most have good knowledge and understanding of the more specialised approaches required for pupils with SLD, ASD or more complex needs. There is some real expertise evident that supports some outstanding learning. In much of the teaching, all groups of pupils have access to activities that are carefully adapted to ensure all pupils can overcome their individual learning barriers and make great strides in their learning. However, there are occasions when teaching styles could be better adapted to meet the needs of pupils with more complex difficulties to ensure their learning is more consistently developed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has improved due to the hard work of senior staff, who are systematically modifying the curriculum so that it is more suitable for the changing needs of the pupils. Increasingly, throughout the school, pupils have access to a wide range of first-hand practical learning experiences that emphasise basic skills, communication and personal and social development. This skills-based approach to learning is very effective where it is used consistently, for example in the lower school, but it is not yet fully established in some classes. There are many very effective additional activities, such as the 'smile club' for pupils who need a quiet place at lunchtime, a lunchtime football club, residential trips and opportunities to share activities with mainstream pupils. These, together with a huge range of visits and visitors and opportunities to save in the school bank, provide a wealth of real-life learning experiences. These not only significantly enhance pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, but also ensure that pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and beyond.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils and their families receive an exceptional level of pastoral care, support and guidance. There are meticulous arrangements to ensure pupils' safety, health and well-being. Partnerships with parents, other schools, health professionals and therapists are extremely strong and make a considerable contribution to pupils' personal development, which successfully aids their learning. Pupils with additional social, emotional or behavioural difficulties receive high quality dedicated individual support. In addition, the Pastoral Support Centre provides invaluable additional guidance to pupils and their families to help them overcome any difficulties that they may have. The school, as a result, has won an award for its work on 'emotional literacy'. If necessary, documents are translated to enable all families to be fully informed of their children's progress. In addition, procedures to help pupils transfer to other settings are equally outstanding. This helps alleviate stress and ensures that pupils are able to settle down to learning very quickly. Throughout the school, there is a strong emphasis on helping the pupils to make sensible well-informed choices. Pupils also receive good academic support and guidance. More able pupils are aware of their learning targets and they are beginning to review their own progress, although this is an area of continued development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders and managers are effectively managing change while at the same time making sure that pupils sustain their good achievement and outstanding progress in personal development. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work very well together and complement each other's strengths. There is a shared approach to leadership and management and the relatively new senior leadership team effectively supports them. They are working hard to develop and adapt the school provision to meet the changing remit of the school. They are keeping abreast of developments in the field of ASD, and for pupils with more complex needs, to aid school improvement and they have an accurate view of school effectiveness. Despite the tremendous amount of work that has to be undertaken in order to plan for the new school, they are not resting on their laurels. The introduction of a skills-based curriculum, and improved systems to assess and monitor pupil progress are already successfully enhancing provision, although these are not fully embedded. However, as a result of these developments, the school is in a better position to provide for the increasing number of pupils who enter school with more complex needs. Nevertheless, the school knows that there is still room to improve the way that they map the progress of these pupils, in order that they can ensure that they are able to set increasingly realistic but challenging targets for this pupil group. Governors are effective. Their particular skills and expertise are used well to support the work of the school. Parents are full of confidence in the school and its leadership and many comment that they 'couldn't wish for anything else from a school and would recommend it to others'.

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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?	2
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
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	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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

5 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Langley School, Sutton Coldfield B75 7HU

Thank you very much for being so kind to us when we visited. We really enjoyed the chance to hear about all the exciting activities that you have done and I especially liked your singing. The most important thing to say is that you go to a good school and we agree with you that it is a happy place.

Here are some of the best things I liked about your school

- You are very friendly and helpful and you enjoy coming to school very much.
- We know that because we could see your smiling faces.
- You make good progress because you are taught well and you work hard.
- You eat lots of healthy fruit and vegetables and work very hard in 'wake and shake' each morning. Keep it up!
- The children in lower school get off to a good start and have lots of interesting things to do that help them learn.
- The staff make sure that you have lots of visits and fun activities.
- Everyone takes very good care of you so you are very safe in school.
- The headteacher and staff are working hard to make Langley an even better place to be.

What I have asked the school to do now to make things even better

- Make sure that some of the teachers are helped to plan some different activities so that those who need a bit more help can learn well all of the time.
- Make sure that the staff look more carefully at how well some of you who have extra problems are doing so they can help you learn even more.

You are very lucky to attend such a caring, happy school and we hope you go on trying hard. We wish you all good luck when you move into your new school.

Julia Coop Lead inspector

5 June 2008



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