

The Old Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103880
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	308447
Inspection date	4 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Patricia Potheary

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	75
6th form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rita Tonks
Headteacher	Gill Cartwright
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2005
School address	Corbyn Road Russells Hall Estate Dudley DY1 2JZ
Telephone number	01384 818905
Fax number	01384 818906

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Old Park School caters for children, pupils and students with severe learning difficulties, a small minority of whom have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), additional autistic spectrum disorders or sensory impairment. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and the rest are from a variety of other ethnic groups, largely British Asian.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Old Park is a good school with an exceptionally enjoyable atmosphere. Pupils aged 5 to 16, post 16 students and children in the Foundation Stage achieve well and make good progress in their subjects and courses. However, standards are well below average because of the nature of their learning difficulties. Learners' personal development and wellbeing, including increased independence, mobility and communication, are outstanding. Learners typically report that they 'enjoy school very much because it is a happy place.' Effective leadership and management continue to build successfully on the good work undertaken before the last inspection to turn the school around. Parents are very positive about all aspects of the school and many of them report how pleased they are with the progress their children are making. Several parents also noted how safe, secure and happy their children are, a fact with which learners agree. Learners behave exceptionally well, paying close attention in class and showing consideration to those around them. The school is particularly successful in helping those with behavioural difficulties who respond well to the help they are given.

Strong teamwork from all involved ensures that teaching and learning is good in all age groups and lessons are lively and interesting and build well on what has been learned before. Learners make good progress in reading and writing although, on occasions, those in the middle ability band with more complex needs make slower progress in these areas than their peers. There are increasing numbers of learners in this group going through the school. Strategies and resources needed to help them are currently being developed but do not yet fully match their needs.

The excellent care and support for all learners include very strong guidance, where each one has suitably challenging targets to help them develop academically as well as personally. These are carefully tracked so that anyone falling behind can be quickly supported. Learners and their parents are involved well in this process. A rich, well-organised curriculum provides plenty of opportunities for learners to develop essential skills and prepare themselves well for the future. These include residential trips, visits and a host of interesting activities, including dance and music performances locally. Learners are enabled through the curriculum to make an outstanding contribution to the community and so develop the confidence and independence necessary for their future placements.

School leaders have developed thorough systems for monitoring how well learners do so that they have a good overview of what needs to be improved. Subject leaders do not yet use this data sufficiently rigorously to pinpoint where improvements within their subjects are most needed. This is recognised by the school as the next step towards further improving teaching and learning.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in their learning and outstanding personal progress, assisted by a good curriculum that focuses on helping them become as independent as possible. The provision is well led and organised and has improved considerably since the last inspection. There is a strong emphasis on practical and work-related activities. Last year, more pupils gained better grades in a larger number of courses than ever before, due in no small part to skilled teaching and effective teamwork by staff. As in the main school, provision to teach reading and writing does not fully meet the needs of middle ability students with more complex needs

and, on occasions, they too make slower progress than their peers in these subjects, although their progress overall remains good. Almost all students who left last year moved into placements where they can be as independent as possible and can be included as fully as possible in the routines of the adult world. The very good links with specialists from outside agencies, especially the transition social service workers and Connexions personnel, as well as staff in local colleges, ensure that the move to the next stage is as smooth as possible. Students' excellent behaviour and the strong relationships they have with the staff are based on mutual trust and respect. Students feel safe and are happy in the Post 16 facilities and they leave as confident young people who expect to be successful.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for the Foundation Stage is good and children make good progress within the early learning goals, especially in their mobility, self-help and communication skills. The curriculum is highly personalised, with suitable opportunities for self-directed learning and plenty of skilled teaching support. The classrooms buzz with enthusiastic activity and the children's excellent responsible behaviour means that they are keen to learn. The outside area provides a relatively narrow range of learning opportunities for this age group and as a result, opportunities to learn outside are satisfactory rather than good. Strong links with home mean that children are happy and settle really quickly.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve achievement in reading and writing for learners of middle ability with more complex needs by ensuring that teaching strategies and resources fully meet their needs
- ensure that subject leaders make better use of the information on learners' progress to pinpoint specifically where improvements within the subject areas are most needed.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

On entry to the school, levels of attainment are very low. However, learners of all ages and abilities achieve well and make good progress although, because of their learning difficulties, standards remain well below average. Learners make outstanding progress in speaking, listening and communication due to the excellent teaching and school focus on this vital skill. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Learners' achievements are wide-ranging and include good progress in mathematics, science and information and communication technology. Those with profound and multiple learning difficulties are taught very well and make the most consistently good progress of all the groups. Although progress overall in reading and writing is good, the increasing group of middle ability learners with more complex learning needs sometimes make slower progress than their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Learners' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is exemplified by their excellent social relationships, which is one of the most notable features of the school. Their

positive, responsible and enthusiastic attitudes to work and each other, and their exemplary behaviour generally, is testament to the impact of the overall ethos and aims of the school. They clearly enjoy all aspects of school life. The school accepts learners who have some extremely challenging behaviours and in this environment they quickly become very responsive to staff and settle down to learn.

Learners clearly understand how to keep healthy and safe, as is shown in their outstanding progress in personal, social and health education lessons. Playtime is a hive of activity, especially using the balls that the school council requested, which are particularly appreciated by wheelchair users. During lunch, everyone is obviously keen to eat the award-winning healthy food provided by the kitchen, and progress on their lunchtime targets is excellent. Pupils display a strong awareness of the importance of personal safety as well as showing kindness and consideration for others.

Attendance is improving and is good when the serious medical needs of many of the learners are taken into account. The school successfully does all it can to minimise absence. As one pupil reported, 'We attend as often as we can because we like this school very much'.

Learners of all ages contribute very responsibly, always looking for helpful things to do, looking after each other, cheerfully carrying out tasks such as recycling or working for the community by visiting elderly people, raising money for charities, or representing the school. They played a full part in a recent dance festival, together with pupils from local mainstream schools. With their excellent communication skills, wide range of qualifications, strong confidence, and experience of mini-enterprise and teamwork, students are very well prepared for their lives ahead by the time they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Outstanding relationships make learners comfortable and confident to express themselves in lessons, and the high quality use of a range of communication techniques ensures that they are all included. This work is supported well by skilled teaching assistants. Learning is good because assessment is thorough, expectations are high, learners know their targets and what they need to do to reach them and these are linked well to lesson objectives. Lessons are highly practical, engaging and fun with a wide range of imaginative activities to keep learners interested, which is one reason why they enjoy school so much and do so well. Planning to meet individual needs and build on what has been learned before is good in most respects. However, strategies and resources used to develop reading and writing skills do not fully meet the needs of pupils of middle ability with more complex learning needs. As a result, their progress is sometimes slower than that of their peers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is organised well to meet the very diverse range of learners' needs and capabilities. The strength of the curriculum is that, in most respects, all subjects are planned and organised equally well and so learners can succeed in a wide range of subjects and courses.

However, there is not a sufficiently wide range of opportunities and resources to fully meet the needs of middle ability learners with complex needs in developing their skills in reading and writing. The curriculum is exceptionally rich in providing an imaginative array of daily activities, visitors, visits and challenges to bring learning to life. Extensive links with other establishments support this work well. They offer a very wide range of carefully planned opportunities that very effectively enhance learners' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Procedures to safeguard learners are thorough and robust. The systems and guidance used to support their excellent personal development and well-being are outstanding. This enables all learners to make excellent progress towards developing their independence, self-confidence and social skills. Action taken to improve attendance is effective. In addition, very effective links with other agencies support learners' welfare and their considerable medical and personal needs exceptionally well. Mobility programmes, for example, are very well designed and, working closely with other professionals, the school has significant success in helping learners increase their movement or begin to walk. This work is enhanced by very strong involvement with parents, whose comments praise the care taken to help their children develop personally as well as academically. As one typically reported, 'Old Park School is a perfect place for my child.' Guidance to help learners improve their work is effective, with detailed aspirational target-setting, which is thoroughly monitored so that those falling behind can be given timely support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have provided some very effective leadership in transforming the school from being inadequate in 2004, as well as ensuring further improvements since the inspection in 2005. Staff morale is high and every major aspect of the school is now, at the very least, of good quality. The extensive work undertaken to map each learner's progress and link this to challenging targets has not only underpinned the improvements but has meant that self-evaluation is accurate and the school knows its strengths and weaknesses well. This has led to successful interventions to improve teaching and learning. As a result, trends in achievement in all subjects continue to rise, especially in speaking and listening and communication. Governors support this work well and provide suitable challenge to keep expectations rising. The capacity to improve is good.

Leadership is now being distributed more effectively throughout the school. The role of subject leaders is evolving well, particularly in encouraging more effective teaching strategies. Subject leaders do not, however, analyse data sufficiently thoroughly to enable them to see more clearly what aspects of their subjects most need improving. The school regards their involvement in this as a key to further raising achievement and progress in the subject areas.

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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?	1	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	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	4	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	

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 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	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?	2	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.

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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
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	
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	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 December 2007

Dear Children, Pupils and Students,

Inspection of Old Park School, Dudley, DY1 2JZ

Thank you for being so welcoming to us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you very much, joining you for lunch and seeing some of your lessons.

We found your school to be successful, well run and very caring. It is a good school, just as several of you and your parents told us it is. It helps all of you to make good progress in your subjects, to gain many qualifications and to make excellent progress in your personal development. School leaders do a good job in seeing that the school keeps improving. You are responsible, hardworking and behave extremely well. The way you try to be helpful and look out for each other is outstanding and you clearly enjoy coming to school. The school is exceptionally successful at keeping you safe, caring for you and guiding you to do your very best.

Your teachers and teaching assistants are skilled at helping you to do well and teaching is good. Your lessons are very interesting and enjoyable. We would like them to help a few of you make more progress in reading and writing. Maybe you can share your ideas of how this might happen.

We were pleased to see that you take plenty of exercise and eat such a healthy diet. We think that the confident way you sign or make conversation and your increasing independence will stand you in excellent stead for your future lives. Your teachers see to it that you have a good range of subjects and courses to help you learn well and prepare for the future. We have asked subject leaders to look at how well you are doing to see if there is anything that could be improved in the different subjects. We are sure that you would help by talking to them about this.

We are impressed with the way you help with the smooth running of the school, and particularly the excellent way you contribute to the community.

We wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely, Lead Inspector

Annex B



5 December 2007

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We are impressed with the way you help with the smooth running of the school, and particularly the excellent way you contribute to the community.

We wish you all the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Patricia Pottecar'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Lead Inspector