

Hazel Oak School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104130
Local Authority	Solihull
Inspection number	308520
Inspection date	4 June 2008
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	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	103
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Kendrick
Headteacher	Amanda Jones
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2004
School address	Hazel Oak Road Shirley Solihull B90 2AZ
Telephone number	01217 444162
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Age group	4-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Hazel Oak is a special school for students with moderate learning difficulties (MLD). Very few students join the school in Reception or Key Stage 1 and most students enter the school in their late primary or early secondary years. All students have a statement of special educational need for MLD and an increasing number have a wide range of additional difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorders and more complex learning difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hazel Oak is a good school. It is a delightfully happy school, where students make good strides in their learning, often for the first time. The students' personal journey is outstanding and many develop the confidence and maturity to enable them to make a significant contribution to others in the school and community. Students of all ages and abilities, including those in Reception, make good progress and achieve well in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Their progress in science is especially strong. Students in Year 11 leave with an increasingly good range of qualifications, including entry level and, for some, GCSEs. The reasons for this success lie in good teaching, a strong curriculum, some excellent opportunities for students to develop personally and effective leadership ensuring that improving the school remains the top priority.

Students speak highly of the school and particularly appreciate the care given to them. As one typically commented, 'I feel very safe here', an experience lacking for several prior to attending the school. Parents are also overwhelmingly pleased with the school, commenting especially at how well their children develop once they join Hazel Oak, many remarking on the 'dedication of the staff'.

Students really enjoy their lessons, finding the tasks interesting and feeling that they are making progress and succeeding. Although the quality of teaching and the progress students make is good overall, this is not consistent. In a few lessons, teachers do not meet the increasingly wide range of student needs, and learning, for some, although satisfactory, slows as a result. The school recognises that in some areas the skills needed for making lessons easy to understand or in providing a suitable level of challenge are underdeveloped. Nevertheless, work undertaken to improve teaching has led to an increasing proportion of high quality lessons. Senior leaders have greatly improved the way students' performance is measured and their individual progress guided. This in turn has led to increased achievement in several subjects, particularly reading and the level of qualifications gained. The school rightly acknowledges that the role of subject leaders in using the information gained to improve standards further is something to be improved.

The outstanding personal development and behaviour of students have been crucial in enabling them to learn. Many join the school with very low self-confidence and soon begin to experience success. This is supported by some excellent opportunities for students to work in teams and take responsibility. For example, they helped design the exceptionally good horticultural centre, design a leaflet about the produce and run a market stall to sell it. The broad effective curriculum meets the very diverse needs of students, from Reception through to those in Years 10 and 11. The resulting skills they develop, alongside their good basic skills and very positive attitudes to work, prepare students extremely well for their future education and careers.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision and the progress children make in Reception are good and, as with the rest of the school, they develop exceptionally well personally. Reception-aged children are very few in number, there being only one or two at any given time. For this reason, they are taught in a class alongside the small number of pupils in Years 1 and 2. Given the nature of their learning difficulties, this arrangement works well, enabling a suitable curriculum with plenty of

self-directed and exploratory learning. There is a busy happy atmosphere in the classroom and some excellent use of the outside learning spaces. Here children enjoy investigating a host of interesting topics to enhance their understanding of the world and extend their physical skills. Good teaching and leadership have been particularly successful in improving children's emerging reading skills through a new phonics-based system. Despite this, the school has identified that staff skills require updating and more focus on children's changing needs. They are therefore planning to increase training to ensure that the curriculum and approaches remain appropriate. Sometimes children do so well in Reception that they are able to move back into mainstream school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the level of teaching skills in meeting students' changing needs so that they make the best possible progress.
- Ensure that subject leaders use the information on students' progress more effectively in order to raise standards further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The knowledge and skills of students when they join the school, and the standards they attain, are well below national averages, due to the nature of their learning difficulties. Nevertheless, students of all ages generally make good progress and achieve well, some making very rapid progress after they have failed to succeed elsewhere. Several students, for example, begin to read for the first time and others are able to attend mainstream college or school part-time to do higher level GCSEs. This good progress is clearly evident in the key subjects of English, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and, particularly, science. A few students in each key stage make satisfactory rather than good progress, although this is not specific to any one ability group. This is largely due to variations in the quality of teaching skills when dealing with the increasing complexity of students' needs. Standards are rising, however, and students are achieving more qualifications each year and at higher levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students enjoy coming to school, as is shown by the good attendance figures and their excellent attitudes and behaviour towards learning. They show considerable maturity in working together in lessons, listening carefully to each other's suggestions and opinions and are very keen to do well. Students behave extremely safely and bullying is rare. Several who have experienced behaviour and attendance difficulties in the past are now model students, their parents reporting that they cannot wait to get to school. It is this change in behaviour, attitudes and social skills for many students that makes their personal development so outstanding. Their increasing maturity is evident in the way students have changed their eating habits to include more fruit and vegetables and in the very high enthusiastic take-up of sport. Students contribute substantially to the school and community, including involvement in greatly improving play facilities, helping select new staff and working through the very active school council. Some even become junior sports leaders in Key Stage 4. In these and other ways, they are prepared exceptionally well for their futures.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In most lessons, activities are varied and interesting, engaging students and supporting their enjoyment and success in learning. In one lesson, a very lively presentation led to lots of laughter and plenty of confidence as students prepared dialogue for a radio show. Teachers provide many opportunities for students to work together, learn independently and contribute their ideas, which they do thoughtfully and maturely. Teaching assistants skilfully support the good learning taking place. Well-organised classroom management contributes significantly to the excellent behaviour and attitudes towards learning. The use of assessment to guide lesson planning has improved considerably. This means that lessons generally meet the diverse range of students' needs well. Occasionally, however, the language used in lessons is too complex or tasks do not provide sufficient challenge for a few, and some students' learning slows as a result. This is balanced by some outstanding teaching and learning experienced regularly in a few lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned to build students' skills systematically, with a good balance of specialist subject teaching and topic-based work. The curriculum is particularly effective in helping students prepare for the world of work, with extensive work experience, several vocational options and regular college placements. There is an exceptionally rich variety of activities, trips, visits and projects to support every aspect of students' outstanding personal development and good learning. High quality sports and arts are key features. The curriculum is increasingly effective in meeting the needs of the wide age and ability range of students. Where the school cannot meet students' needs, strong links ensure that they are able to join courses elsewhere. To address changing needs, the qualifications offered at Key Stage 4 are increasing. The school recognises that the range will not be sufficient to meet fully the needs of the more able younger students as they move through the school groups and they are working to address this.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Procedures to safeguard students' welfare are robust, with very little unkind or unsafe behaviour. The outstanding guidance to support students' personal development is most evident in the many students who show remarkable improvements in their self-esteem, attendance and abilities to learn. Students' work is carefully assessed and regularly monitored so that challenging targets can be set to support them in making good progress. This process is still being developed, and not all students are yet clear about their targets, their progress or what they need to do to improve. The school recognises this and is continuing to develop teacher skills in this area as a key priority in raising standards further.

A small minority of parents expressed concern about a lack of regular communication with the school, particularly about their child's daily experiences, although this is not the experience of most parents. The school is working closely with parent groups to meet particular needs and has made several recent improvements to links with parents.

The arrangements to prepare students for the next stage of their education are greatly improved and more links are being established with colleges and other schools, although suitable opportunities after the age of 16 remain limited in the local area.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, well supported by her deputy, has provided very effective direction for improving the school. Key developments have taken place in many aspects of the school's work during the last two years. Most importantly, there have been considerable improvements in the way students' performance is assessed and analysed, to enable more challenging whole school targets to be set. This has secured the outstanding personal development and good progress made by students. Self-evaluation is good and leaders at all levels, including governors, understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well. This has led to rapid improvements in several subjects, including reading, ICT and science. The role of subject leaders in using data to raise standards further in their subjects is not as well developed. Senior staff currently oversee this role in order to speed up the process of ensuring good progress for all students. The capacity to improve is good.

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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?	2
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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
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?	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
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 Students

Inspection of Hazel Oak School, Solihull B90 2AZ

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

Your school has a lively and happy atmosphere. It is a good school, with many excellent things going on, just as you described. Good teaching helps you to make good progress in your lessons, especially science, and outstanding progress in your social and personal skills. Those of you in Reception also make good progress, with some exciting work in learning letters and sounds.

Staff and governors work hard to keep improving the school. For this reason, the progress you make is increasing all the time. We have, however, asked them to make sure that all of you make as much progress as the majority by improving the way some lessons help you learn. We have also asked that staff look more closely at each subject to make sure that you are getting the very best from all the different things you study. I am sure that you will discuss this with your teachers and help them by working hard and doing your best to reach your targets.

Your teachers see to it that you have an excellent range of activities to help you develop strong confidence, independence, creative talents and understanding about the world of work. You were keen to tell us that the school also keeps you safe and looks after you well. It is therefore very pleasing to see that you are helping yourselves by taking plenty of exercise and eating such a healthy diet. Your behaviour is also excellent, especially in the way you value learning.

We are also impressed with the responsibilities that you take on within the school and how much help you give to others. You clearly really enjoy coming to school. All these things, together with your high quality basic skills and excellent skills in working together, will help prepare you very well for your college, work and future lives.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Potheary Additional Inspector

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Yours sincerely

Patricia Potheary
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