

Merstone School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104133
Local Authority	Solihull
Inspection number	308521
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	67
6th form	17
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Kendrick
Headteacher	Amanda Mordey
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2004
School address	Windward Way Kingshurst Birmingham B36 0UE
Telephone number	01217 171040
Fax number	01217 171041

Age group	2–19
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2008
Inspection number	308521

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Merstone School is a co-educational school for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. Increasing numbers of pupils have autistic spectrum disorders and approximately 10% of pupils have additional medical needs. Almost two thirds of pupils are boys. Most pupils are white and English is the main language for all pupils. The school has an early years assessment unit for pupils aged 2 to 5 years. The school was co-located on a shared campus with another school in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Merstone School is a lively and vibrant school, whose overall effectiveness is good. It has a number of outstanding features. The school facilities are superb and provide an extremely conducive atmosphere for pupils' learning. The shared campus also gives excellent opportunities for pupils to participate in inclusive activities such as creative dance and musical performances with children from other schools. The school works very closely with parents, particularly when pupils start school, and links remain close with parents throughout the school. This helps pupils to settle quickly into school initially and the ongoing close partnership benefits pupils' progress across the school. Parents are delighted with their children's good progress and enjoyment of school. One parent typically commented, 'Our daughter has made an incredible transformation since attending Merstone.'

Pupils make excellent progress in the Foundation Stage and at post-16, due to outstanding teaching in these areas. Teaching in the main part of the school is generally good, but is more variable, with some teaching being satisfactory. Pupils' progress is good throughout the rest of the school. Pupils' needs are carefully assessed. For example, activities are carefully planned for those pupils who are able to benefit from shared lessons with pupils from other schools. The outstanding curriculum does much to increase pupils' enjoyment of learning and to promote their self-esteem and confidence by allowing them to experience small steps of success.

The care, support and guidance offered to pupils are outstanding. Links with parents, other schools and professionals such as physiotherapists and speech therapists are very strong and this is beneficial in overcoming or reducing barriers to pupils' learning. Pupils are prepared exceptionally well for all stages of transition in their education, whether at the start of their schooling, moving to other classes or schools, or eventually to college and the wider world. As a result, pupils' personal development is outstanding. They develop into confident young people who thoroughly enjoy school. As much as pupils are able, they develop very well their understanding of leading healthier and safer lifestyles.

The headteacher and senior leadership team provide clear and assured direction for the school. Under the guidance of the leadership team, the new school facilities have been excellently planned and managed for maximum benefit to the pupils. Although the school makes good use of pupils' assessment information at an individual level, it is aware that use of summary information to measure the rate of pupils' progress over time and to help with monitoring is an area for development. The inclusion programme is well managed and gives pupils the opportunity to make new friends, develop social skills and extend their learning.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Pupils make excellent progress in the sixth form. The department has a distinctive ethos from the rest of the school, and this gives students a sense of progression and a different feel to this phase of their education. For example, students enjoy using their own common room to relax in. Students achieve very well in a wide range of accredited courses which are well suited to their needs. The achievement of accredited awards for students, regardless of their abilities, contributes strongly to their self-confidence and maturity. Students develop their independence skills exceptionally well and they put these skills to good use in the community environment such as in work experience placements and college settings. Students enjoy the courses they

follow at the local college. New procedures are being developed to map students' progress against assessments designed for older students.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children make excellent progress because learning activities are stimulating and engage pupils' attention. For example, they enjoy experimenting with water in the outdoor area. Activities are well matched to their needs. The assessment of their skills is clear and focused and children make particularly good progress in communication and personal, social and emotional development. The classroom is a calm, happy place where children feel safe, and are well supported in a warm, vibrant and caring environment and children respond well to this. Staff work extremely closely with other early years settings and with parents, with one parent commenting, 'The support they give is amazing.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Use the wealth of assessment information more effectively and concisely to show clearly how well pupils make progress over time and to assist with monitoring.
- Improve teaching so more lessons are good and outstanding in the main part of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The standards for pupils are exceptionally low because of the nature of their severe and profound learning difficulties, but their progress and achievements are good. In the Foundation Stage and post-16, progress is outstanding.

Pupils make particularly good progress in speaking, listening and communication skills, information and communication technology (ICT), physical education and personal development. As a result, pupils' self-confidence, maturity and independence skills develop very well. The headteacher has made perceptive use of comparative assessment data and this supports the school's view of pupils' good progress in these areas. This analysis of the information has also led the school to review its provision for how well pupils with the most severe and complex needs communicate using switches and has resulted in improved outcomes. However, currently the school does not have a clear measure of the rate of pupils' progress over time, such as key stages. The majority of pupils meet their individual targets that are set for them on a termly basis and whole-school pupil progress targets are generally achieved. All pupils regardless of gender or special needs achieve equally well in line with their abilities. Older pupils perform very well in achieving a range of externally accredited academic and vocational awards. More able students are challenged well so that they achieve accredited entry level awards in areas such as home management, ICT and personal care.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils are enthusiastic learners. They are sociable and responsible young people who are interested in finding out about other cultures. For example, they play and sing African music

with gusto. They have good spiritual development and show a sense of wonder when visiting places of worship. They enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their good attendance, good behaviour and positive attitudes to their work and to each other. The relationships in school are very positive, with pupils reporting that they have lots of friends and that they feel safe. One member of the school council commented that she feels safe because 'I know I have people all around me.' Pupils demonstrate their good understanding of healthy lifestyles through the choices that they make, such as the 'healthy tuck shop' that pupils run, and by joining in active school clubs. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community, including helping to appoint new staff and making choices on the school uniform. They are very proud that they raise money for national and international charities. Older students achieve accredited courses and they develop very good workplace skills, particularly through work experience and this, along with excellent transition arrangements, means they are well prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

One of the strong features of teaching is the supportive relationships between staff and pupils. This instils confidence in pupils and encourages them to succeed. Lessons are well planned to meet the full range of pupils' needs. Support staff are well deployed and teamwork is very effective. ICT is used very creatively to engage pupils' attention. For example, in one lesson, pupils enjoyed listening to music and then digitally recording their percussion instruments along with the song and listening to their performance. Varied and stimulating lesson activities engage pupils very effectively in learning. Teachers are adept at using a mixture of strategies such as whole class, group or individual work to ensure lessons have a good pace. Teaching in the main part of the school is generally good and in some classes is outstanding, although some teaching is only satisfactory. Occasionally learning objectives are not always made clear and are not recapped at the end of lessons during the plenary session. In the best lessons, plenary sessions extend beyond 'show and tell' to test pupils' understanding and recall of knowledge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

An exemplary feature of the curriculum is the wide range of externally accredited awards pupils can achieve from Key Stage 3 onwards, regardless of their ability. This provides pupils with a real sense of accomplishment and develops their self-esteem immensely. Enrichment of the curriculum is provided through a wide range of visits and visitors and the school offers an extended service one day a week where pupils can participate in leisure and creative activities. Older students participate in work experience opportunities, which prepare them very well for the future and develop their maturity. Resources are of exceptionally high quality and the purpose-built facilities enhance the learning environment for pupils substantially. With the excellent facilities and resources, ICT is rapidly becoming a strength of the school. The creative arts are also a strength. The school works effectively with external providers to develop the creative and performance arts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils receive exceptional support, guidance and care. This is shown strongly in the careful planning pupils receive to help them cope successfully with transition. Parents also appreciate the very well focused support they themselves receive. Pupils' involvement in setting and reviewing their own next steps in learning helps them to be motivated to work hard. All staff, including professionals who visit the school, work together very well to support pupils, ensuring that all therapies are carefully planned. High levels of supervision ensure pupils feel safe and valued. Staff support pupils skilfully to help them become independent as they move through the school, and they become increasingly confident in their abilities. For example, some older students take part in travel training to enable them to be independent around their community. Safeguarding procedures to ensure pupils' welfare are robust and underpinned by thorough staff training.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher provides confident leadership, sets high expectations, and is well supported by senior staff and governors. Good monitoring systems, particularly of teaching, have been established and this has resulted in the school having a good understanding of areas that require further development. As a result, there is good capacity to improve the school even further.

The school has developed a wealth of assessment information which is used well to assist teachers in their planning. Good use has been made of comparative data to highlight strengths and areas for improvement in areas such as in reading, writing and the communication skills of some pupils. However, the use of simplified and concise assessment data to measure the rate of pupils' progress, for example over key stages, and to help the governing body to monitor the work of the school more easily is less well developed. As a result, although the school's self-evaluation is generally accurate, it has been too cautious in judging how well pupils make progress in the Foundation Stage and at post-16.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
---	----------------	-------

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	1
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	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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	2	
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	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
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	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	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

6 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Merstone School, Birmingham B36 0UE

I enjoyed my visit to your school and the chance to meet and talk with you. You have a bright and attractive school. You make good progress in the main part of the school and excellent progress in the Foundation Stage and post-16 departments. Many of you said how much you enjoy school. All the staff do an excellent job in looking after you and at getting the best out of you. This encourages your confidence, independence and maturity very well, which enables you to develop well. Children in the Foundation Stage and students in the post-16 department are taught exceptionally well, and teaching is good across the rest of the school. Your teachers are very good at making lessons interesting and fun so that you learn well. The things that you are given to learn are just right for you. It is very good that many of you can gain awards for your work, especially as you get older.

Your headteacher works extremely hard and does a good job of running your school. She and other members of staff, along with your help, have made sure that the new school is a wonderful building and it helps you to learn more in lovely surroundings.

To make the school even better I have asked the school to:

- look at how it measures your progress so that this information can be used more easily by people who check the work of the school.
- improve teaching so more lessons are even better in the main part of the school.

You can have a part to play in this by continuing to work hard at school and enjoying your lessons. I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Frank Price Lead inspector

6 June 2008



Dear Pupils

Inspection of Merstone School, Birmingham B36 0UE

I enjoyed my visit to your school and the chance to meet and talk with you. You have a bright and attractive school. You make good progress in the main part of the school and excellent progress in the Foundation Stage and post-16 departments. Many of you said how much you enjoy school. All the staff do an excellent job in looking after you and at getting the best out of you. This encourages your confidence, independence and maturity very well, which enables you to develop well. Children in the Foundation Stage and students in the post-16 department are taught exceptionally well, and teaching is good across the rest of the school. Your teachers are very good at making lessons interesting and fun so that you learn well. The things that you are given to learn are just right for you. It is very good that many of you can gain awards for your work, especially as you get older.

Your headteacher works extremely hard and does a good job of running your school. She and other members of staff, along with your help, have made sure that the new school is a wonderful building and it helps you to learn more in lovely surroundings.

To make the school even better I have asked the school to:

- look at how it measures your progress so that this information can be used more easily by people who check the work of the school.
- improve teaching so more lessons are even better in the main part of the school.

You can have a part to play in this by continuing to work hard at school and enjoying your lessons. I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Frank Price
Lead inspector