

Gilbrook School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105134
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	308773
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Sue Hunt

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	4–12
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Joe Roper
Headteacher	Mr Robert Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	7 July 2003
School address	Pilgrim Street Birkenhead Merseyside CH41 5EH
Telephone number	0151 6478411
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Age group	4-12
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Gilbrook is a special school for primary aged boys and girls who have statements of special educational needs because of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some have additional learning needs such as dyslexia. Pupils are admitted at different times during the school year, some with a history of non-attendance and extreme behaviour, which in many instances has led to exclusion from their mainstream school. Consequently, many learners have considerable gaps in their skills and knowledge, particularly in terms of communication, language and literacy. The attainment of the majority of pupils when they enter the school is well below the standards attained by pupils of the same age nationally. Currently, the vast majority of pupils are of White British origin and a small minority are looked after by the local authority. The school is situated in Birkenhead but serves the whole of the Wirral, as it is the only provision within that authority for pupils of primary age with such special educational needs. The school also provides an Outreach Service offering advice and training for teaching and non-teaching staff in 29 mainstream primary schools. There are 51 pupils on roll, 45 boys and 6 girls. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is 66%. At least 50% of pupils at the end of Year 6 return to mainstream education each year.

The school has a Bronze Award for Health Promotion, the Gold Star Award from the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations for parental involvement, Activemark Award for Sport and the International Award (Intermediate level) for developing links with schools in France and Japan.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Gilbrook is an outstanding school in all respects. The comment, 'His behaviour was awful in his old school; after two terms he is a new boy', is typical of the views of parents. The first-class leadership of the school has improved the quality of provision reported at the last inspection and established a strong drive for continued improvements. Pupils' achievement in science and mathematics is excellent and recent additional strategies are having a very significant effect on progress in literacy. Results in the Year 6 national tests, while significantly below the national average, are excellent results for pupils with emotional, behavioural and social problems. They indicate the outstanding achievement of pupils with significant barriers to their learning. The school is highly successful in supporting pupils' integration back into mainstream schools when they are academically and behaviourally ready to return.

Teaching is consistently of a very high quality throughout the school. The demand for the school's Outreach Service from local mainstream schools is a testament to the high regard the school is held within the local authority. Excellent use is made of a range of teaching and learning strategies as well as superb behavioural management. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has improved since the last inspection and is now embedded throughout the school. However, some staff do not always use the excellent facilities such as interactive whiteboards to enhance their teaching and make learning more fun and colourful. The climate for learning, however, is calm and purposeful in all classrooms.

Pupils achieve extremely well and make very significant progress from the time they arrive at the school. This is characterised by the great enjoyment they gain from being at the school and by their good attendance, improving behaviour and excellent caring relationships they have for each other and for their teachers. Older pupils speak highly of the benefits they have gained from going on school trips and residential visits. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and is well promoted through the programme for personal, social and health education. Throughout the school the excellent curriculum provides access to an enriching range of relevant and specially tailored activities to suit individual learning requirements. The themed weeks and days help towards this. This term pupils have enjoyed a book themed week with the last day devoted to everyone including staff dressing up as their favourite book characters - there were lots of Harry Potters! 'Sausage day' went down very well with pupils making a variety of sausages and consuming them at the end of the day accompanied by mash and beans.

Pupils know how important it is to keep themselves safe and healthy. A typical comment is that 'we know we are safe here'. With their parents, pupils make a very strong commitment to the school and local community. For example, parents all say how grateful they are for the support and guidance they receive through excellent events such as the weekly coffee mornings and learning sessions. There is an active school council and pupils feel that they are listened to by staff. The school has robust policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils.

School governors are very closely involved in supporting staff and pupils. They challenge the senior leadership group well and ensure that they implement very effective monitoring and self-evaluation. Staff welcome the focused visits by the governors' committees as opportunities to share their successes. The school demonstrates outstanding capacity to improve, with high morale among staff and the many agencies working with the school. It is securely placed to

move forward particularly with the highly successful Outreach Service it provides. The school provides excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make learning even more exciting and effective for pupils by building some staff's confidence to use interactive white boards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve extremely well and enjoy their learning. The nature of their learning difficulties means they do not generally meet standards expected of pupils of their age in mainstream schools. Instead, their progress is measured against challenging individual targets and they regularly meet these with a great deal of success because they are well taught. Pupils are entered for the standard assessment tests each year. In summer 2007, 47% of pupils achieved Level 4 in mathematics with 6% achieving Level 5. In science, 65% achieved Level 4 and 29% achieved Level 4 in English. Although these results are very low compared to the national averages, they are exceptionally high for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school has identified the need to improve literacy especially handwriting and to this end has put into place a well targeted strategy which is having a very positive effect on improving achievement generally in English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also outstanding. Because they enjoy school, and helped by the fact that all pupils are transported to school, attendance is good. Excellent supervision of pupils ensures that the school is a safe place with pupils contributing well by behaving sensibly and considerately most of the time. There is a very robust system to manage behaviour and over their time in school, the majority of pupils significantly improve their behaviour and their attitudes to learning, so that it is outstanding. Pupils are aware of the fact that if they are troubled by anyone or anything, staff will be quick to help them. Pupils understand the importance of living healthy lives. They learn the importance of exercise and participate very enthusiastically in all types of competitive sports, for example, the school has a very successful football team comprising of boys and girls who are part of main school fixtures within the Wirral. Pupils' contribution to the local community is strong. They regularly raise funds for local causes and at the present time are supporting the education of a boy in Africa. The school is developing strong links internationally with schools in France and Japan, sharing work with them and contacting them via the Internet. Pupils express their views of what they like and do not like about school through the active school council. Pupils also contribute well to communal activities, such as assemblies and welcome visitors such as artists in residence into their school. By improving their behaviour and working hard to achieve their targets, pupils considerably enhance their future prospects in the wider world.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Excellent teaching in a safe and happy environment results in pupils learning well and usually making outstanding progress. Small class groups and skilled support from classroom assistants contribute enormously to ensuring that each pupil gets the help and attention he or she needs. Teaching is characterised by confidence, superb preparation and streamlined classroom management. Teachers make lessons interesting and lively, which helps to ensure the engagement of pupils and minimises disruption. When individuals are particularly troubled, staff are extremely skilled at managing misbehaviour. A good characteristic of teaching is the way all pupils are involved in their learning, for example, pupils who are shy are encouraged and enabled to contribute to discussions and more confident pupils are not allowed to dominate. Frequent checking of what pupils have learned and remembered ensures that learning tasks are well matched to individual ability. The improved provision of ICT since the last inspection has helped to raise the quality of teaching and planning. However, there are a few teachers who do not always use the electronic whiteboards within the classroom situation to enhance their teaching because of a lack of confidence and skill.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It meets all requirements and is well enriched with a wide range of activities out of the classroom to promote learning and personal development. These include residential opportunities where pupils develop independence and teamwork skills. There is a very good focus on numeracy, literacy, science and personal, social and health education; ample time allocated to the many other subjects of the curriculum adds breadth and interest to learning. As well as the annual residential trips to places like France and Northumberland, pupils frequently visit museums and places of beauty and interest. These are all successfully linked to their learning in humanities, such as the project completed recently on the Liverpool Slave Trade, and engage pupils extremely well in their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are exceptionally well cared for, guided and supported, which gives parents enormous satisfaction. Parents remark how amazingly supportive the school is and how their children have progressed both academically and behaviourally in even a short time at the school. The excellent links between the school and a wide range of other agencies ensure consistent approaches to pupils' welfare. Procedures to ensure the safety and protection of the pupils are very thorough and care is taken to avoid unforeseen accidents by careful assessment of possible risks in all activities. Pupils' academic progress as well as their personal, social and behaviour are assessed and targeted extremely well and this is ensuring the education and care of the 'whole child'. The school is very clean, attractive and inviting.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher and his senior team have set a very clear direction and successfully led the school to build further on what was very firm ground. The leadership has developed a thriving Outreach Service, which is valued amongst partner schools throughout the borough. The Outreach Service is having a very positive influence on the school as a whole, particularly with enhancing and stimulating the curriculum. The governing body has developed into a firm and critical friend and governors play their part exceptionally well in the development of the school. The school evaluates its effectiveness accurately and thoroughly, although it has been reluctant to give itself full credit for success in its self-evaluation form. It uses surveys to capture the views of its pupils, parents and other stakeholders and analyses the results carefully. Where analysis shows up areas that need attending to, these are prioritised in the school improvement plan. Because of outstanding leadership that they find supportive and inspiring, staff are confident in their work. All staff are involved in most aspects of managing the school, making decisions and, therefore, this creates a very happy and successful working environment. Resources are well managed and the accommodation has been carefully adapted to fully meet the curriculum requirements of its pupils.

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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
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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

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	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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	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	1
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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Gilbrook School, Pilgrim Street, Birkenhead, Merseyside, CH41 5EH

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I am writing to let you know what I found out. Yours is an outstanding school. The headteacher, teachers and staff care for you extremely well and they work closely with therapists, people from other agencies and your parents and carers to find the best ways of helping you. You do really well in gaining confidence and self-esteem because you listen to each other so well and you support each other in a caring way. You make excellent progress with your schoolwork because of your hard work and the skills of your teachers and the many staff who support you and them.

The school provides many opportunities for you to take part in exciting activities such as the residential visits to great places such as St Valery de Somme in France. You are given the opportunity to show what you have learned in the standard assessment tests in Year 6 which equip you so well in your chosen secondary school.

In the context of your school being outstanding I have asked the head teacher and the governors to help some of your teachers to use the interactive whiteboards more in lessons to make learning even more exciting for you. Keep up the super work you are doing.

I wish you all the best for the future.