

Piper Hill High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105611
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	308893
Inspection dates	1–2 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	106
6th form	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jane Dowell (Acting)
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Jones
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	200 Yew Tree Lane Northern Moor Manchester M23 0FF
Telephone number	0161 998 4068
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average-sized special school that caters for students with significant learning difficulties. Currently, 69 students have severe learning difficulties and 37 have profound and multiple learning difficulties. In addition to their severe learning difficulties, 18 students have very challenging behaviour. All students have statements of special educational needs. Around one in three of the students is from a minority ethnic background. Like most other students, many of these are in the early stages of learning to communicate. The school is part of an Excellence in Cities Action Zone. Many of the students come from areas that are economically and socially disadvantaged. In 2005, the school achieved specialist school status in the areas of mathematics and computing. It has gained the Healthy Schools Gold Award and achieved the National Healthy School standard. It holds Investors in People status, Sportsmark and Artsmark Gold and Eco-School Awards, and the Manchester Inclusion Standard at Gold Level. In September 2007, the school became one of the local authority's specialist support schools. Its sixth form is known as 'the further education department'. The school will be relocated in 2009 to share a new site with a mainstream secondary school under the Building Schools for the Future programme.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Students consider that Piper Hill is 'a good place to be'. In fact, it is an outstanding school. Students leave as confident and well-rounded young men and women because their personal development is exceptional. They answer a resounding 'Yes!' when asked if they enjoy school. One reason for students' enthusiasm is the outstanding curriculum which offers a breathtaking variety of activities, such as a huge range of visits and many different lunchtime and after-school clubs. These allow students to develop and pursue interests and provide exciting contexts within which to practise skills learned in the classroom. Many students are particularly keen on sport and they are extremely aware that being active is an essential factor in keeping healthy. As they move up through the school, students begin to take some degree of responsibility for their own safety, for example, by learning to communicate their feelings or becoming safe users of the Internet. Exemplary arrangements for care, guidance and support mean that potential risks posed, for instance, during visits, are assessed very carefully and necessary actions then taken to minimise them. Because they trust the staff and feel safe, students are able to relax and tackle new experiences with confidence. These positive attitudes come into their own in the further education department, when students take on challenges such as work experience and making decisions about their future lives. They are prepared extremely well to continue their education, for example, by learning to make informed choices and to use information and communication technology (ICT) resources. Students make outstanding contributions to the school and the wider community. School council members work hard to help others. For example, they appealed successfully to the prime minister for money to buy equipment to help them keep the school grounds free of litter.

Whilst the nature of students' learning difficulties means that their standards are well below national expectations, their progress and achievement are outstanding. Teachers are thoroughly familiar with the needs and stage of development of each student and plan in very great detail to enable them to take the next step forward. Enhanced resources and staff training, made possible through the school's specialist status, have resulted in students making faster progress in mathematics and ICT. Teachers' and students' enhanced skills in these areas are spilling out into all parts of the curriculum. For example, high quality ICT equipment is used confidently as a tool to support teaching and learning. Teams of senior staff oversee the school's specialist work. The rigour of these arrangements typifies Piper Hill's first-rate leadership and management. Leaders seized the opportunity for specialist status because they recognised its potential to help them provide 'the absolute best' for each student. Already there is clear evidence of a very strong contribution to both the outstanding improvement made since the previous inspection and the school's overall effectiveness. For example, links with the community are increasingly enhancing work-related learning for Piper Hill's students and are starting to support the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream schools. Obstacles to learning such as exceptionally challenging behaviour stimulate the school to be creative and it leaves no stone unturned in order to find solutions. This is just one reason why Piper Hill has an outstanding capacity to continue to develop.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

All students leave the further education department with a range of accreditation to recognise their outstanding achievement. Depending on the levels at which they work, they are successful

in National Skills Profile and Accreditation for Life and Living courses or have units of their work, for example, in mathematics, English and ICT, accredited through the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers promote students' independence at every opportunity, reflecting the department's commitment to preparing them for their lives beyond school. The exceptional curriculum combines opportunities for students to continue to develop key skills with meaningful projects in which to practise these. For example, students earn money for their work in the school caf., use ICT to create menus, and communicate with their customers and with staff in shops and when banking their takings. Care, guidance and support are just as outstanding as in the main school. The support for students' transition to the next stage in their education is an especially strong feature. The department is led and managed extremely well by a deputy headteacher. There is a very clear determination to enable all students to achieve their fullest potential in school and after they have left.

What the school should do to improve further

- Only minor areas for improvement were identified during the inspection. These are already being successfully dealt with through the school's comprehensive systems.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Individual and whole-school targets, including those for mathematics and ICT, are very challenging. They are almost always met and are often exceeded. Students' progress is assessed and tracked extremely accurately. The information collected demonstrates clearly that there is no difference in the achievement of particular groups of students. For example, whilst girls and boys with profound and multiple learning difficulties often move forward in very small steps, their achievement is just as outstanding as that of other students when their individual starting points are considered. Students with challenging behaviour, some of whom have been excluded from previous schools, often make remarkable progress. Students from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as those from White British backgrounds. Standards in the school's specialist subjects have risen. For example, the highest attaining students reached unprecedented levels in the 2007 Year 9 mathematics national tests. As a result, small numbers have this year embarked on GCSE or entry level courses. During Key Stage 4, all students gain external accreditation for units of their work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students say that they particularly like their friends and the staff, football, and going on visits. Older students comment very positively on residential stays. These enable them to face up to physical challenges such as climbing or canoeing, experience French life, or explore the Houses of Parliament. Such activities help to ensure that spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students' awareness of healthy living is recognised by the Healthy School's Award and reflected in their knowledge that eating Five a Day is desirable. Behaviour is often exemplary. Students who join the school with exceptionally challenging behaviour become increasingly able to cope with stressful situations, learning to recognise when they need 'time

out' in order to calm down. Attendance is above average for a school of this type. Students are keen to save energy and those in the further education department make compost to grow their own fruit and vegetables which they learn to prepare and cook. The school's belief in the value of teamwork extends to its students, who cooperate exceptionally well with staff and each other. Enterprises such as the 'Butty Business' thrive as a result and help to prepare students for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teachers' accurate evaluations of what students have learned inform highly detailed lesson plans. Activities are chosen extremely well in order to promote learning at just the right level for each individual. For example, a very challenging lesson for higher attaining Key Stage 4 students enabled them all to develop science skills, consolidate learning in writing, mathematics and ICT, and have enormous fun through a carefully managed competition. Teachers have a very good awareness of how best to help different groups of students to learn. For instance, individual schedules enable students with complex communication difficulties to cope with changes of activity. Behaviour is managed very effectively and unobtrusively, supported by excellent relationships with students. 'Staff are polite and kind', students explain. Staff teamwork is exceptional and teaching assistants contribute significantly to learning. They help promote independence by allowing time for students to do things for themselves. Lessons are usually organised very well but occasionally, staff use learning time unnecessarily to attend to students' personal care.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is adapted very well to meet the needs of different groups of students. For example, because standards have risen through specialist status work, the highest attaining Key Stage 4 students now have separate lessons in key subjects, such as mathematics, enabling them to work towards higher-level accreditation. The specialist status has led to new and highly effective programmes of work, for instance, to incorporate new technologies such as digital video production. Extensive college and community partnerships support the school's work extremely effectively, especially in the further education department. Links with other schools are developing well, although at a slightly slower rate than anticipated in the very challenging specialist school targets. 'Options' sessions extend the scope of the curriculum and enable students to choose from activities such as music, gardening and aerobics, supporting learning and personal development. Students' one criticism of school relates to the accommodation and they are right in considering that it does not fully meet their needs or those of the curriculum. For example, a number of classrooms are small and inconvenient. Plans for the new school indicate that these issues are to be resolved.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Arrangements to keep students from harm are rigorous and effective. Thorough induction arrangements and the staff handbook help to ensure that all concerned are aware of relevant policies and procedures. Staff training is comprehensive and relevant to students' needs. Particularly vulnerable students are cared for sensitively. For example, support for those who cannot eat or drink independently is extremely well organised and is overseen by the full-time school nurse. Staff are very alert to changes in students that might indicate that they are unwell. Students say that they feel safe and are clear that staff would help with any problems. Higher attaining students help to set and review their own targets, so they are aware of what they need to do in order to improve. Students joining the school are supported very well. For example, shared units of work, developed with the primary school through specialist status work, help to smooth the transition from Year 6. A very wide range of agencies enhances the school's work. Increasingly, the school provides opportunities for parents to develop their own skills and support their children. For instance, an ICT course was recently much appreciated by mothers of pupils from minority ethnic groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher's enthusiasm and determination are shared wholeheartedly by staff and particularly by the senior team. Its members set extremely high standards, for example, in the quality of teaching. A network of teams informs all staff of students' needs and the best ways to meet them. Systems for self-evaluation are exceptionally thorough and well organised. They provide a sharp and accurate picture of the school's strengths. Moreover, because a culture of continuous improvement is embedded, areas where further development is expected are also clearly identified. The school welcomes external confirmation of its own judgements about its work, as seen in the plethora of awards achieved. Targets, including those linked to the specialist school status, are very challenging and are used extremely effectively to raise standards. Reading, mathematics and ICT have all improved as a result of actions taken to meet targets. Governance is good. Governors are very supportive and well informed. They are increasingly finding out about the school at first-hand and asking challenging questions of its leaders.

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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	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?	1	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

Inspection of Piper Hill High School, Northenden, M23 0FF

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when the inspectors visited your school. We really enjoyed our time with you and now I need to tell you what we found out. I know that you find reading hard and so your teachers will tell you about this letter.

You told us that you like school. I am not surprised because you do so many exciting things. We were amazed to hear about all the visits you go on and the different clubs in school. You have a lot of fun. The school council told us how much you help each other and other people. You are learning to be very good citizens. Well done! We were very impressed with your excellent behaviour. This helps to make the school safe and the staff also look after you extremely well.

You all learn a great deal and the oldest students get plenty of certificates to show how hard they have worked. This is because you have outstanding teachers. They make sure that the further education students are ready to leave school when the time comes.

Piper Hill is an outstanding school. Your headteacher and the staff are always thinking of ways to make the school even better. The new school building should make it easier for the staff to teach you and look after you, with more space for everyone.

I want to send my best wishes to every one of you.