

Heltwate School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110948
Local Authority	CITY OF PETERBOROUGH LA
Inspection number	310464
Inspection dates	26–27 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Steven Parker

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	111
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Bowes
Headteacher	Mr Douglas Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2005
School address	Heltwate North Bretton Peterborough PE3 8RL
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Age group	5-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Heltwate educates pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties. Many have additional physical or communication needs and around a fifth have learning difficulties on the autistic spectrum. All have statements of special educational need. About a quarter come from minority ethnic groups but none have English as an additional language. There are currently no children in the Foundation Stage or Year 1. Pupils' social backgrounds reflect the diverse nature of the catchment area, and the proportion entitled to free school meals is above average. Just under 10% are in the care of the local authority as looked after children. Typically for this sort of school, there are more boys than girls. The school has the Inclusion Charter Mark and Health Promoting Schools status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Heltwate is a good school, where excellent pastoral support helps pupils to make extremely impressive progress in their personal development. A number of pupils spoke about their previously unhappy experiences of school, how they had been helped to regain a sense of self worth and had come to enjoy being at school very much. The good overall attendance rate is testament to how much all pupils value the rich variety of enjoyable learning experiences on offer and the support and encouragement they receive from all staff. Although standards are well below average, because of the nature and extent of pupils' learning difficulties, they all nevertheless make good progress and achieve well. This is because they are well taught by their teachers, supported skilfully by their assistants, who endeavour to identify and meet individual needs through a good, well-structured curriculum. In the lower school, this is in spite of the less than ideal accommodation in which they work. There is a collective commitment to ensuring that pupils are helped to be as independent as possible. More able pupils are encouraged to negotiate their own targets and assess progress towards meeting them. Older pupils leave with passes in an increasingly wide range of accredited courses and are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

Care guidance and support is outstanding. All staff work very productively in partnership with parents and carers, which contributes significantly to parents' high level of satisfaction with the school. One parent poetically spoke for many when she wrote that 'the day my child got a place at the school was the day the rain stopped and the sun began to shine'. It is certainly the case that the focused support offered often makes a considerable difference to the lives of pupils and their families. The school nurtures and maintains very high quality collaborative relationships with a wide range of agencies and professionals, which enable specialised support for pupils' particular needs. There is a clear ambition to return to the earlier productive working partnerships with local schools, which have lapsed due to changing circumstances.

There have been good improvements across all aspects of the school since the last inspection. Leadership and management are good. The senior leadership team are now working well together and individuals are more accountable for their areas of responsibility. The headteacher has ensured that there is a shared vision for how the school will continue to develop and there have been some notably successful developments, most especially in the way the needs of autistic pupils are met. The school has a realistic view of what it does well and what it needs to do to improve further. Its approach to self-evaluation is satisfactory, but is not consistently informed by rigorous monitoring across all aspects of its work. This is sometimes because staff do not have a clear idea of how best to measure the impact of their work and opportunities are often missed by not building evaluation approaches into the initial plans for initiatives. The school does not yet have a structured approach to making best use of the information it already collects to inform its development planning and demonstrate its effectiveness. The governors are, as a result, constrained in their ability to challenge, although they do provide good support and encouragement. There is good capacity for further improvement and the school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a more structured and rigorous approach to gathering, analysing and presenting information about all aspects of the school's work, in order to: - inform development planning - demonstrate its effectiveness - strengthen governors' capabilities to fulfil their role.

- Liaise with the local authority to improve the lower school accommodation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils, whatever their starting points or difficulties, make solid progress as they move up through the school, so that their achievements are good. This represents a notable improvement since the last inspection. By the time they reach the end of Key Stage 4, pupils have built successfully on their earlier learning, both in school and at local colleges. This enables them to achieve good results in a range of accredited courses, which include the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Youth Award, National Skills Profile (NSP) and Accreditation for Life and Learning (ALL). In the current academic year, pupils have also started to study for GCSE Entry Level in mathematics and science. Boys and girls make equally good progress. Comparisons between national data and emerging information from the new assessment arrangements demonstrate that all needs groups, including looked after children and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, perform equally well. The very effective work of staff in the recently established group for autistic pupils in the lower school has had a significant impact on pupils' ability to manage their own behaviour and benefit from the highly structured teaching. This has meant that many have made very good progress. Progress against targets in individual education plans is good overall, although variable across classes, because some targets are not as specific and measurable as others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They enjoy learning very much and parents confirm that their children like coming to school. Attendance is good and pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Opportunities are used well to raise pupils' awareness and understanding of diversity and many different cultural customs. The school council is listened to and appropriate action taken to follow their suggestions. Examples include the revision of behaviour management procedures and the choice of play equipment. The wealth of well established community links makes a considerable contribution to the development of pupils' social skills, self-esteem and personal independence. The wide range of educational visits enrich significantly pupils' personal awareness of life beyond school. These include a visit to the Houses of Parliament where pupils met and talked with a local Member of Parliament, and the superb use of a local farm to introduce younger pupils to a variety of animals whilst also providing older pupils with quality work experience placements. The school's positive approach to leisure activity options and the outstanding range of extra-curricular activities teach pupils the value and benefits of a healthy lifestyle and contributes significantly to the development of their citizenship. Pupils display trust and respect for adults as well as utmost care and consideration for one another. They also make a very strong contribution to the wider community through many activities, such as their re-cycling and composting initiatives and substantial fundraising for worthy causes. Pupils learn most effectively how to stay healthy and safe: they take part in physical activities with real enthusiasm. Well planned work-related learning helps them to develop life skills and to grow in maturity, preparing them very well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning have improved and are now good. Teachers and their skilful assistants work in effective partnerships to support pupils' learning well. High quality relationships and social harmony are evident throughout the school and underpin pupils' positive approach to their learning. This is particularly impressive in the lower school in the context of the cramped classrooms, many of which can only be accessed through neighbouring rooms. Most planning is well informed by assessment of pupils' earlier learning and activities are suitably challenging, but this is not consistent across the school. A wide range of approaches, including very good behaviour management, the use of visual timetables and picture exchange methods, is employed to ensure that all pupils have an equal chance to participate in lessons. The excellent work that has been undertaken over the recent past to develop staff expertise in meeting the needs of autistic pupils has meant that all pupils, whether in the specialist class or integrated into other groups across the school, are very well supported.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum was satisfactory at the last inspection and is now good. The strong emphasis on physical and leisure activity options and the development of independence skills is highly relevant to pupils' needs. Lessons are taught in an imaginative manner that helps stimulate pupils' learning while ensuring a good sense of reality in the development of their life skills, for example in the use of real rather than plastic money. Personal, social, health and citizenship education permeates the life of the school, and has a clear emphasis on enjoyment of learning and the building of pupils' self-esteem at its heart. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well throughout the school to support pupils' learning and all gain considerable benefit from the more than two hours of physical activity they experience each week.

While older pupils benefit from good educational links with local colleges, the lack of established mainstream links with other schools restricts social development opportunities for other pupils to learn alongside their mainstream peers. The close partnership between the school and Connexions staff provides older pupils with good quality career guidance and work experience placements. For pupils of all ages, learning is enriched by an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, educational visits (including many abroad) and visitors to the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding care, guidance and support underpin pupils' good achievement and excellent personal development. All staff ensure pupils learn and grow in a safe and supportive environment. Appropriate statutory arrangements are in place for protecting and safeguarding pupils. The school works very well in close collaboration with education and health professionals, therapists and other outside agencies in meeting pupils' specific care and personal needs. Partnership with parents is very strong and they are kept fully involved in decisions about their children's education, target setting and personal development. The school has a very good understanding of how well pupils are doing and most individual education plans include good, clear and achievable targets which are shared regularly with parents. Exemplary transition

procedures ensure that pupils and parents are fully aware of, and quickly settled into, the routines of school life. Whole school pupil tracking and assessment is at an early stage of development, but it has the potential to make a major contribution to improving the quality of academic guidance and support the pupils receive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and his senior leadership colleagues lead well by example, set challenging targets for themselves and their colleagues to work towards and have created a strong team spirit right across the school. An important strength and contributor to this has been the support and regular training provided for the staff, who are continually encouraged to develop their skills and realise their individual potential. Teaching assistants in particular have felt empowered by this recognition. Management responsibilities are increasingly being distributed further across the school. There are good plans in place to ensure that middle managers can develop the necessary capabilities to make consistent judgements about the quality of teaching and learning and provide the right sort of guidance for their colleagues. Governors fulfil their statutory duties, provide strong support and are developing their role as critical friends. They do ask questions, but are not fully able to challenge because they are not as well informed about the school's effectiveness as they could be. The school's under-developed approaches to gathering and analysing information about the school's work and the lack of a structured approach to governors visiting the school are significant contributors to this situation. Day-to-day organisation, longer-term financial management and fund raising are all good. Improvements effected since the last inspection, the significant gains made in the recent past and a strong whole-school commitment provide promise that there is good capacity to improve further.

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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 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	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
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?	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
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	3
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	3
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

28 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Heltwate School, Peterborough, PE3 8RL

Thank you for making us feel so welcomed when we visited. We came to see how well you are getting on and whether there is anything that could be better. We agreed with you and your parents that yours is a good school.

You said how much you enjoy school and we could see why. We were very impressed by how confident and polite you were and thought that the school council was representing your interests very successfully.

You are getting on well with your school work and growing up into sensible young people who know how to stay safe, eat healthily and take exercise. You also help at school by doing jobs and thinking of others. As you get older you learn about the world of work and how to get on well in groups. We were glad to see how well you behave.

The staff at school work with a lot of other people to make sure that you are well cared for and have the help you need. They also plan lots of interesting and enjoyable activities that make learning fun. These things help you to be happy at school and learn well. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together in lessons to help you learn successfully.

We have suggested that the school could be even more successful if it could find better ways to collect and use information about the way it does its work. This would help the governors to do a better job and enable the school to improve. We also felt that the lower school building should be improved to give you more and better classrooms to learn in.

We hope that you all keep up the good work and wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Steven Parker

Lead Inspector