

The Russett School and The Cheshire MSI Unit

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111506
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310610
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Preece HMI

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	87
6th form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Roberts
Headteacher	Mrs H Watts
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2004
School address	Middlehurst Avenue Weaverham Northwich Cheshire CW8 3BW
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Russett School and Cheshire MSI Unit is a special school which provides for children and students who have severe or profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some of the young people also have conditions such as autistic spectrum disorders, challenging behaviours and multi-sensory impairment; all have a statement of special educational needs. Fewer than half the pupils are female. Pupils come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and over a third are eligible for free school meals. A very small number of individuals are from minority ethnic backgrounds and an even smaller proportion are looked after by the local authority. There has been significant staffing disruption during the past year. Although the headteacher has been in post for some time, most of the senior leadership team are new.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Russett School and Cheshire MSI Unit offers good provision. This happy and inclusive school is well led and managed and provides good value for money. Teaching and learning are good. The careful balance between well structured activities and stimulating experiences provided for students with multi-sensory impairments is a particular strength of the school. Individuals are supported and involved, as far as possible, in monitoring their own progress. Teaching is well planned and purposeful, especially so in the lower school. This combined with positive teamwork and high expectations, promotes very good attitudes to work and good achievements. The Foundation Stage has a highly individualised and effective programme. Children in Key Stages 1 and 2 make very good progress in their communication and social skills and individual children make outstanding progress in some other areas of learning in which they have a particular aptitude. Learning across the rest of the school is good. Teaching assistants make very strong contributions to learning. Behaviour is managed very well. The school has attained the Inclusion Quality Mark which recognises the good links with local primary and secondary schools and outreach work with local children's centres. Students have many opportunities to go out into the community, applying skills learned in the classroom, trying new experiences, and interacting with unfamiliar people. These opportunities to practise and transfer skills contribute to pupils' good personal development.

The staff work hard to promote a healthy and safe environment and all young people are helped to appreciate the importance of a good diet and plenty of exercise and, as a result, the school has gained the national Healthy Schools Award. The school council is proud of its achievements and is quite clear that this is a school where people help each other. Pupils take their cue from the good care, guidance and support that the staff provide. For example, education staff, therapists and nursing staff work closely together to identify the best ways to meet the health, welfare and personal care needs of all in their care. Consequently, barriers to learning are reduced and students are helped to be as comfortable and relaxed as possible. There are many whole-school activities, such as the recycling project, which effectively promote the notion of good citizenship. During a period of staffing turbulence, strong leadership and management have ensured that students' learning and personal development have not been interrupted. Self-evaluation shows that senior leaders and governors have a good overall understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

This is an area identified by the school as satisfactory but requiring further development and inspectors agree with this judgement. Progress and achievements are satisfactory in the sixth form. Students enjoy their time and gain a wide range of certificates but they are not always sufficiently challenged in their work. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and some is good. However, there is insufficient acknowledgement of students' adult status. The curriculum is satisfactory but insufficiently coherent; too much is based upon a variety of units of accreditation which are not always well matched to individual needs or provide adequate levels of challenge or progression. Staff provide many experiences for students to learn within the community such as college links, where appropriate, but the work-related curriculum is underdeveloped. The quality of care, guidance and support and students' personal development are good

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise students' achievements in the sixth form by improving teaching and learning and developing a more coherent and better matched curriculum.
- Increase the sharing of best practice and improve whole school target setting.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

As a result of their learning needs, all children enter the school with standards that are well below what is expected of other youngsters of their age, but over time they make good progress given their abilities and starting points. Progress is very good for children in Key Stages 1 and 2 and good in Key Stages 3 and 4 because they are taught successfully from a well planned and organised curriculum. The progress of post-16 students is satisfactory but there are some weaknesses in how and what they are taught. There is a strong and effective focus on developing students' communication and social skills and this helps them to achieve well in all subject areas. The high quality displays of the students' work throughout the school helps to create a stimulating learning environment. Transition between the key stages is good and effectively planned. Rigorous analysis of assessment data for specific groups ensures that the needs of students are well monitored and evaluated. There are no significant differences between the progress made by different groups of students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Throughout their time in the school children develop awareness of their feelings and how to express them appropriately. They have a good appreciation of diversity through their work on different cultures, and know that this brings richness to life and society. They enjoy school very much; attendance is improving. The majority of absences are usually for a compelling reason, most frequently because of the need for continuing medical interventions or because of illness. Behaviour both in lessons and around the school is very good. Students are very considerate of one another. As they grow older they show increasing confidence and the development of social skills. The school council is very proud to represent classmates and other members of the school community. The council actively fund raises and promotes the social life of all who attend the school. It is a good example of students making their voices heard to the benefit of the whole school community. Attitudes to school are good. Students thoroughly enjoy their lessons and take pride in their learning. Students adopt healthy lifestyles and are very well informed about the need to eat sensibly and keep active. They join happily in the opportunities for exercise, games and support that the school provides.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The majority of teaching is good. There is strong emphasis on developing communication and basic skills, effective use of sensory learning resources, and presentations that capture and sustain students' interest. This was particularly observed during a lesson for young students with visual impairment. Skilled teaching enabled the students to achieve well, as they learned to count to 10. Where teaching is less than good, activities are not well matched to individual need and more able students are not sufficiently challenged. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the success of lessons through skilful support and well timed interventions. In the best lessons teachers' planning is rigorous; each student has an identified target that is linked directly to their individual education plan. Very good use is made of the multi-disciplinary team within the school. During a lesson which was part of an on-going programme to develop students' speaking, listening and communication skills, there was rigorous planning between the speech therapist and the class teacher. Teachers and teaching assistants continuously assess students' achievement. The information collected is well used to modify teaching to meet individual students' needs and set their learning targets. In the sixth form there is excessive emphasis on external accreditation and some lessons lack sufficient challenge so students repeat work they have already done.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is good. There is a strong emphasis on enabling students to communicate effectively and to develop the social and life skills that they will need in the future. Provision for students with multi-sensory impairment and for those with profound and multiple learning difficulties is very good. Provision for literacy and numeracy helps students to gain basic skills, preparing them for the future. However, the sixth form curriculum lacks coherence and the clarity that would deliver a very clear progression route within the curriculum. There are many opportunities for students to learn about personal care, independence and the management of money. They enjoy hydrotherapy, swimming, horse riding and many sports, making a significant contribution to their physical development. Those with more complex needs have their lives enriched through approaches that stimulate their senses. The school successfully uses a variety of communication systems to enable all individuals to get their message across. Approaches include picture exchange communication systems, signing, objects of reference and switch technology so that all have the best possible chance of understanding the world around them and making choices. The accommodation is well used to provide additional learning resources. For example, students enjoy using the gardens and outside areas within the school grounds. Visits out of school include to galleries, theatres and museums and these are often linked to topics being studied.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school accurately identified that care, guidance and support are good. Staff work hard to ensure that all the children in their care are well supported and that appropriate guidance is timely and of good quality. Representative views from parents include, 'we are all privileged to have the staff work so hard for our children' and another commented, 'we have nothing but praise for this excellent school and have always appreciated the dedication of staff in doing their best for our child over the past 14 years'. All staff are strongly committed to the students' best interests. Procedures for safeguarding are comprehensive and regularly reviewed. Staff are well trained in this area: all those who work at the school know what is expected of them. Rigorous risk assessments are in place for all activities beyond those normally undertaken. The progress of students is monitored well. Personal and academic targets are set through individual education plans and these are well reviewed each term. Teachers and classroom staff are skilful in giving learners praise and promoting their confidence. They also make clear to them what they need to do to improve. There are effective links with outside agencies and other schools and colleges. Students' introduction to the school is carefully managed, ensuring that the majority settle quickly into their new environment. Although students who are due to leave school are well prepared for their futures, the options available to them are very limited.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management of the school are good despite significant staffing disruption, a depleted leadership team and a period of low morale over the past year. These issues, although not fully resolved, have been well managed and there is now overall unity with a shared vision, direction and purpose within the school and the sixth form. Staff are fully committed to ensuring that all students receive a high quality educational experience. Responsibilities are effectively distributed amongst the staff which ensures that they all contribute to the determined drive towards excellence. The continuing professional development provided for staff is good and ensures that students' complex learning needs are well met. Self-evaluation is thorough, and mainly accurate and effective in bringing about improvement but the review of the sixth form provision is insufficiently critical and did not identify the lack of coherence in the curriculum and over reliance on external accreditation. The systematic monitoring of teaching is effective but insufficiently formalised so that overall strengths and areas for improvement are not adequately collated or used for setting whole school targets. School development planning is adequate, combining the personal and academic needs of the students. The school regularly seeks the views of parents and carers; the majority are confident that the school is well led and managed. There is zero tolerance of any incidence of bullying or racism and, to the best of their ability, students report feeling valued, safe and well supported in their learning. The school has maintained its good practice since the last inspection. In particular, the governing body knows the school well and provides effective support and challenge. With the well established ethos of continuous improvement, The Russett School and Cheshire MSI Unit has a good capacity to improve.

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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?	2	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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?	2	2
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	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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	3
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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	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	

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

As you know we recently visited your school to find out how well you are doing. We really enjoyed our visit and learned a lot about your school. We particularly liked visiting lessons and meeting the student council. These are just some of the things we found about your school.

- When you arrive at the school the staff help you to settle in and identify what you need to learn. What is really good is that so many of you make such good progress in your social and communication skills because of the help you receive from all staff.
- The leadership team, staff and governors are guiding and supporting you well but we have asked them to help you learn even better by setting clearer targets.
- We asked your parents and carers for their views of your school. They have great confidence in the work of the school in caring for you and leading you to success.
- You try hard with your behaviour and we were impressed when you help each other and stay calm and stick at what you need to do.
- You are taught well and we have asked that your teachers, particularly those in the sixth form, match your learning more sharply to your abilities to help you achieve even more.

You are rightly proud of your good school and I wish you lots of success for all that you do in the future.