

Holmwood School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 111775 |
| Local Authority | Middlesbrough |
| Inspection number | 310681 |
| Inspection dates | 3–4 October 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Alastair Younger |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 77 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Margaret Palmer |
| Headteacher | Mr John Appleyard |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 March 2005 |
| School address | Saltersgill Avenue Easterside Middlesbrough TS4 3PT |
| Telephone number | 01642 819157 |
| Fax number | 01642 829981 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many pupils have additional learning difficulties in the moderate to severe range and several have autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils come from all areas of the town and a few from further away. Most, but not all, pupils come from homes in areas of considerable social and economic disadvantage. Pupils can join the school at any time. There are very few children in the Reception Year, but many others join at an older age when mainstream school placements have broken down. Nearly all pupils have been underachieving for long periods prior to their admission and skills on entry are low. The timing of the inspection meant that many pupils had only been attending for a matter of weeks. Most pupils are White British and a minority are looked after by the local authority. Boys significantly outnumber girls.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It is well led and managed, and gives good value for money. The excellent headteacher, working alongside good senior managers and a highly experienced and dedicated governing body, has overseen the development of a charming school that has a wonderful atmosphere. As a result of the good progress pupils make in their studies and personal development, their chances of living successful, happy lives are greatly improved. There have been many improvements since the previous inspection and good systems are in place to enable the school to carry on improving.

Pupils achieve well because teaching is good and because excellent care, guidance and support help them to overcome their difficulties and to develop better learning and personal habits. The results of statutory assessments do not truly reflect attainment because the most successful pupils are regularly returned to mainstream primary schools to be replaced by new pupils who are attaining well below their potential. Even though results are well below the national average and too many pupils did not meet their personal targets in mathematics last year, results have improved for the last five years running.

Classroom teams are well led by teachers and complemented by good teaching assistants. Pupils behave well and work hard in class because learning is made interesting and they are extremely well supported. Occasionally, a bit more could be expected of pupils, especially in terms of the amount of writing they are asked to do. The timetable is rich and varied, with many exciting opportunities for pupils to learn and develop outside the classroom, on frequent trips and in clubs at break-times and after school.

Most of the time, the school is very settled, with pupils behaving safely and sensibly. Occasional outbursts of antisocial behaviour by individuals are always extremely well managed so that pupils do not get drawn into each other's problems. There is an excellent air of spirituality about the school. Pupils are encouraged to think about their lives and develop a strong sense of realistic optimism. Parents are almost unanimous in saying their children are happier at Holmwood than they have ever been elsewhere. This is reflected in their good attendance.

Pupils are strongly encouraged to develop healthy lifestyles. The school has achieved national recognition for the quality of its physical education and after-school activity programmes. A good programme of personal, health and social education complements this, as does the encouragement of healthy eating.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage is good. When it is considered in the best interest of children, older ones from Years 1 and 2 are frequently included in it. This is a good move because many of these children are at such an early stage of learning and personal development that they can benefit more from the good curriculum it offers than they would from the Key Stage 1 curriculum. Teaching is good and children achieve well, often making startling progress in becoming more sociable and attentive. The Foundation Stage is well led and managed and is improving rapidly, following two years in which achievement slipped.

What the school should do to improve further

- Lift the quality of teaching by increasing the level of challenge in lessons, especially in writing.

- Raise achievement in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well. The nature of their difficulties, and their low attainment on entry, mean that they rarely meet the standards expected of pupils in mainstream schools. Nevertheless, each year, all eligible pupils are entered for national tests and assessments and, for the past five years, these results have improved to the point where last year over a quarter of pupils met national expectations for mathematics and science at the end of Year 6. This is a particularly good result given that many of the pupils who have made the most progress are returned successfully to other schools before the end of Year 6 to be replaced by underachieving pupils from those same schools.

In schools such as this, achievement is measured against individual targets and, here, these are met with a good degree of success. Parents are very happy with the progress their children are making. In lessons observed during the inspection, most pupils were seen to be making good progress.

As with many schools of this kind, achievement in speaking and listening tends to exceed that in reading and writing. Success in improving pupils' social skills, coupled with good teaching, ensures that pupils make good progress in learning that listening is every bit as important as speaking. Many pupils remain reluctant writers, as much out of lack of confidence as for any other reason. The school has identified this as an area in need of development. In mathematics, in 2007 about a third of pupils did not achieve as well as expected. Nevertheless, standards are rising especially in pupils' ability to use and apply their knowledge.

Good achievement is spread over many subjects because the curriculum is good and because the school recognises the importance of a well-rounded education. Huge improvements in new information and communication technology (ICT) resources, identified as a weakness by the last inspection, have greatly benefited pupils and aided their progress in many subjects. There is no significant difference in the achievement of any group of pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. There is frequent, fulsome celebration of success and parents of ethnic minority pupils have held events in school, such as a fair in celebration of Asian and Arabic culture, with stalls offering traditional foods and jewellery. Pupils are strongly encouraged to develop skills which help them to become more independent and responsible for their own actions. They are allowed to make mistakes, but are then extremely well cared for, guided and supported with the result that they can learn from them. Behaviour is usually good, especially in lessons. This represents excellent progress from a frequently very low starting point.

Misbehaviour is usually closely related to pupils' recognised difficulties and individual crises. Attendance is good because most pupils enjoy school and want to come. There is virtually no unauthorised absence and attendance has improved for each of the past five years. Pupils are strongly encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. Most of them enjoy strenuous activity at break times, there is a strong programme of physical activity and healthy options at lunchtime are very popular. Close supervision helps keep the school safe though the occasionally reckless behaviour of a few individuals sometimes causes unease amongst others. Membership of the

school council is a badge of pride and promotes a good sense of community. The progress pupils make in their learning and personal development contributes well to their future well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good. This results in most pupils making good progress. Behaviour is confidently managed by well organised and skilled classroom teams. This means that misbehaviour is rarely allowed to interfere with learning. Most pupils are keen to listen and join in with dialogue, but many are less enthusiastic when they are asked to write about what they have learned, and teacher expectations are not always sufficiently challenging in this respect. High staff numbers in each class help to ensure that all pupils get the support they need to improve their learning and behaviour. Teachers are well prepared and most are very clear in their own minds exactly what they want pupils to learn in each lesson. Care is taken to ensure that work is varied to ensure that each individual can achieve to their own potential if they try hard. Teachers can do this because they keep a close check on what pupils learn and remember.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It meets all requirements and is exceptionally well enriched through an extensive range of clubs and visits to places of interest. This adds enormously to pupils' enjoyment of school. A good balance is maintained between promoting learning and personal development. Subject leaders are taking increasing responsibility for monitoring and developing their subjects. There is a good focus on promoting numeracy, science and ICT alongside literacy, but in this latter area there is still scope to promote writing more strongly. Transfer from the Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1 is carefully managed, with pupils who require a bit more scope to develop early learning skills being given extra time in the Foundation Stage when it is needed. The promotion of personal social and health education is central to the curriculum and features strongly in all lessons, not just those timetabled for the subject.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support of pupils are outstanding. Partnerships with external agencies are excellent and provide detailed support and advice for staff. All pupils have comprehensive individual education and behaviour plans which help staff to extend guidance and support systematically to great effect. Staff have extensive skills in managing pupils' behaviour and making sure that they are protected from their own actions and those of others. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements, health and safety are rigorously monitored and possible risk in all activities and situations is carefully assessed to help avoid accidents. Pupils' academic progress and personal development are constantly monitored so staff can quickly spot individuals who are not doing as well as expected. When this is the case, extra support is quickly directed to avoid any deterioration. In the safe and hugely supportive atmosphere of the school, all pupils are given equal opportunities to succeed. Parents are enormously supportive of the school's work and express considerable gratitude for the fact that they are kept extremely well informed about all the good things their children do, as well as the not so good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership, management and governance are good. They have resulted in the school having a very good reputation within the local authority and being extremely well respected by parents. Staff enjoy working in the school and pupils enjoy attending. Staffing changes are well managed even though it is not always easy to recruit. Teaching is closely monitored. This highlighted a slight lowering of the quality of teaching last year. Effective steps have been promptly taken to reverse this trend. Finances are very carefully managed to ensure that the school is well resourced. Considerable, well directed investment in ICT resources in recent years has brought enormous improvement to an area of weakness identified by the previous inspection. Improvement planning is good. Areas in need of attention are accurately identified and professional development opportunities are carefully considered to help staff teach pupils well and to ensure that the excellent standard of care, guidance and support offered to pupils is maintained. As a result, all pupils share equal opportunities to learn and develop. Parents and pupils are regularly consulted and good account is taken of their views. Realistically challenging targets are set for pupils and most are met with a good degree of success.

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.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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? | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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| 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

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 |
| 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 | 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| 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

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| 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 | 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 | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| 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

5 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holmwood School, Middlesbrough, TS4 3PT

I had a lovely couple of days in your school recently. Thank you for making me so welcome and special thanks to those of you who made the time to talk to me.

I visit lots of schools like yours to try to see what makes them tick and if anything could be suggested to make them even better. I thought your school was good and that the headteacher and staff already have good ideas to make it better.

I sat in your classrooms and saw you being well taught. Most of you were well behaved and you seemed keen to learn. A few of you though weren't very keen to put pencil to paper when teachers asked you to write about what you had learned. I've asked teachers to expect a bit more of you. I also noticed that some of you were not doing as well in mathematics as had been hoped, so the school is going to look into this.

I am sure you enjoy all the trips you go on and the clubs that are organised to help make each day interesting. Your timetables look good, a really nice mix of subjects and activities. I was extremely impressed with the way you are looked after and helped to succeed.

I hope you enjoy your assemblies each day as much as I did. It was great to see so many of you getting special awards for getting things right and to see everyone celebrating.

Good luck for the future and keep up the hard work.

All the best

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector