

Ellen Tinkham School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113633
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311318
Inspection dates	16–17 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath 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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	104
6th form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jenny Miller
Headteacher	Jacqui Warne
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2003
School address	Hollow Lane Pinhoe Exeter EX1 3RW
Telephone number	01392 467168
Fax number	01392 464011

Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ellen Tinkham School provides for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD), profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and those with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). All pupils have a statement of special educational need and the majority are boys. Almost all pupils are of White British origin and their home language is English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above the national average. Pupils are drawn from Exeter and a wide catchment area within a 40-mile radius of the school. The school roll has increased steadily in recent years. Building works are currently being completed to extend provision for older students. The school was granted specialist status for cognition and learning in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Ellen Tinkham School provides an outstanding quality of education. In the words of one parent, 'The school has a wonderful atmosphere, it is obvious the staff and pupils love what they do. Parents and carers are made so welcome.' This view is echoed by parents generally. They are justified in holding the school in such high regard. Pupils and students make progress that is good, and in some respects, outstanding. For example, the excellent curriculum and very high quality of care ensure that their personal development is outstanding, and those with the most complex needs make outstanding progress due to a very carefully planned sensory curriculum.

The school's success is underpinned by a close partnership between teachers, therapists and parents, which provides a consistent approach to meeting the particular challenges set by pupils' complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The provision of therapy is outstanding. Therapists are very successful in tailoring programmes to meet the wide range of pupils' needs and in sharing their expertise with staff and parents. This enables similar strategies to be used both at school and in the home, which reinforces pupils' learning.

The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to outstanding and is good overall. Staff use Makaton signing, pictures and symbols very effectively to help pupils communicate. A few staff are relatively new to working with children who have severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities but are developing their skills. In a small number of lessons, this means that the full range of pupils' needs is not met fully, which in turn results in some pupils making slower progress. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly by the headteacher and her deputy, but the skills of some other highly competent senior staff are not utilised fully in monitoring teaching in their subjects. This limits opportunities to share best practice across the school.

The headteacher is a passionate leader and staff at all levels share her vision and commitment. The school has very strong links with the local community and has established excellent partnerships with other schools. The school's recent specialist status is helping to develop this aspect of its work even further. The school has improved considerably since the last inspection and the few weaker areas have all been tackled successfully. The rate of improvement and strength of the staff team demonstrate the school has an excellent capacity for raising its performance further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is successful in ensuring that all students leave school with a suitable destination. A range of activities is provided which is very appropriate to the students' age. This includes an accredited lifeskills course, work experience placements, community visits and taster courses at a local college. Some students join in activities with other pupils in Year 11. The assessment and recording of students' progress are underdeveloped and do not take place often enough to capture small gains in their learning and to inform teaching. This limits the progress of a few students.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Parents and carers are extremely positive about the way in which their children are helped to settle in when they join the Reception class. Children make outstanding progress, and as one

parent commented, 'My son has only been at the school since September, but already I can see him making progress and I know he is happy to go each day.' The teacher, nursery nurse and learning support assistants work very well as a team and lessons are planned to maximise fun and enjoyment. Children display impressive social skills and learn to make choices and take responsibility, for example, when choosing a song for the group to sing. Pictures, symbols and signing are used very effectively to aid communication and photographic evidence is used well to record progress. Comprehensive profiles showing each child's strengths and areas for development in the main areas of learning are completed for children when they move up to Year 1. The classroom provides good space and displays are organised very thoughtfully to focus on key topics.

What the school should do to improve further

- Share more effectively the features of best teaching so that its quality is consistently high across the school.
- Improve arrangements for assessing and recording students' progress in the sixth form to ensure that small gains in learning are noted and used to inform teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils and students reach standards that are well below national levels due to their special educational needs. The school uses 'P' scales (performance descriptors used for recording the attainment of pupils with special educational needs working towards the first level of the National Curriculum) to record progress. Pupils are gaining higher 'P' levels over time and some reach the early levels of the National Curriculum. This represents good progress. It is even better for the pupils with the most complex needs, as a result of the close working partnership between education staff and therapists, together with the strong sensory curriculum. The school has introduced the teaching of pupils in groups with similar needs and capabilities for part of the week. The full impact of these changes has yet to be seen, but evidence suggests they are already raising successfully the achievement of pupils in numeracy and literacy. Targets are used effectively to raise standards and are centred around all aspects of pupils' individual needs, including their physical, sensory and educational development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils and students really enjoy coming to school and learn to become more independent and self-confident young people. Their behaviour and concentration in lessons is outstanding due to the stimulating range of activities provided. Attendance is excellent. 'My child always comes home happy,' stated one parent. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Staff set a very good example in the way they relate to pupils and the strong emphasis on group work has a marked impact on the development of pupils' social skills. Reflection time at the end of the school day promotes pupils' spiritual awareness very well. Their self-esteem is particularly raised when pupils receive certificates and badges for effort and achievement in weekly 'special mention' assembly. Awareness of different cultures is promoted strongly in assemblies and through projects.

The school emphasises the importance of healthy eating and has achieved the Healthy Schools Award in recognition of this work. Highly appropriate eating programmes are in place which emphasise independence. Pupils grow produce on the school allotment, and this helps them understand the origins of what they eat. A very good range of sports activities leads to pupils achieving awards for swimming and athletics. Pupils respond well to physiotherapy and develop their use of wheelchairs and walking frames. As part of the school's promotion of independence, pupils are also taught to use tools and equipment safely. Pupils contribute well to the community when they raise money for charity. The school council encourages pupils and students to make decisions and they respond very well by taking responsibility for tasks around the school; for example, when they take daily information around classes, or return the register. Pupils and students are prepared very effectively for life in wider society through the school's focus on developing independence, the range of activities provided in the community and the work experience programme.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching often features practical activities that capture pupils' interest; for example, when they explore the effect of magnets in science, or use role play to act out a story. Expectations are high and activities include the use of objects of reference and sensory resources to engage those with the most complex needs. Teachers, learning support assistants and therapists form excellent relationships with pupils and students, treating them with respect and encouraging them to try their best. They have a very good knowledge of the school's systems for improving communication, and such resources are used extensively to help pupils make choices and participate in lessons. Learning support assistants demonstrate a high level of skill. They work effectively with individuals and small groups, assist with the provision of therapy programmes and support pupils' inclusion in the community.

In a few classes, activities are not tailored sufficiently to meet the wide range of pupils' needs. This leads to pupils with complex needs losing concentration or more capable pupils not being given sufficient challenge. The school has a very good induction programme in place which is helping new staff to acquire the necessary skills. Assessment of learning is generally good with the extensive use of photographs to record achievements. However, there is some variation in assessment and recording between classes and its use is underdeveloped in the sixth form.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The strength of the curriculum lies in the school's unified approach to meeting pupils' and students' educational and therapeutic needs. It is supported by an excellent range of activities that are carefully tailored to meeting the needs of pupils with PMLD, SLD and an ASD. These include sensory experiences, hydrotherapy, occupational therapy, music therapy, speech and language therapy and physiotherapy. The school's excellent links with the community provide additional activities such as inter-school sporting competitions, horse riding, part-time attendance at mainstream schools and a variety of work experience placements for older

students. The personal, social and health education curriculum is very appropriate for pupils with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities, with a focus on keeping safe and developing self-respect. Pupils and students follow a very good range of accredited courses which lead to GCSE Entry level and lifeskills qualifications. A charity connected to the school organises a wide range of after-school, weekend and holiday activities which are well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The strong teamwork in the school is central to the school's high standard of care, guidance and support. New pupils are visited at home and a 'communication passport' drawn up which includes an assessment of the student's medical, therapeutic and educational needs. Staff have had very good training in managing challenging behaviour and in manual handling. This has had a marked impact on reducing the number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Appropriate child protection and staff vetting procedures are in place and intimate care arrangements ensure pupils are treated with dignity and respect. The school has introduced a very good advocacy scheme to ensure pupils are fully involved in the review of their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher has a clear vision for taking the school forward which has had a significant impact on improving its effectiveness. The school has achieved the Investors in People Award, which recognises its success in building a strong staff team. The school has excellent links with the wider community which include providing advice and support to other schools. The school works closely with parents to ensure care is sensitive to pupils' individual needs and all are included fully in the life of the school. As one parent of a new pupil commented, 'Communication is excellent and I already feel part of the school community.'

The leadership has very high expectations and, although the school's self-assessment provides an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, some judgements on its achievements are unduly modest. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly by the headteacher and deputy headteacher; however, the skills of some other highly skilled senior staff are not utilised fully to monitor teaching and share best practice.

As part of its specialist school status, the school has set ambitious targets for raising pupils' achievement using 'P' scales and for extending further its links with the community. These targets are being used successfully to guide key aspects of the school's development, such as changes in teaching, the curriculum and staff deployment.

The school uses its resources very effectively and is successful in raising additional funds from charitable organisations. Governors provide good support for the school. They visit the school regularly and ensure all statutory requirements are met. Following changes in membership, the governing body is reorganising its committee structure to share responsibilities more efficiently and provide sharper oversight of the school's work.

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

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	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	1	
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	2
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	2
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	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	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

18 October 2007

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Ellen Tinkham School, Exeter, EX1 3RW

Recently, I visited your school. I enjoyed my visit very much and thought it was a very happy school. Thanks to those of you who took time to talk to me about your work and life at school.

Here are the main points.

- Your school is outstanding and helps you to make good and sometimes excellent progress.
- The school helps you very well to feel good about yourself and helps you to do more things on your own.
- There are a lot of exciting things for you to do at school and in the wider community.
- You really enjoy coming to school and your behaviour is excellent.
- Adults run the school very well and make sure you receive the right level of care and support.
- Adults are very good at using signing, pictures and symbols to help you communicate.
- The school works very closely with your parents and other schools to help you learn.
- To help the school get even better, I have asked teachers to share their good work with each other.
- I have also asked teachers in the sixth form to check more often how you are getting on in your work. You can help by looking after your work carefully.

Thank you once again for your help during the inspection.

Best wishes

Andrew Redpath Her Majesty's Inspector

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