

Victoria Education Centre and Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113954
Local Authority	Poole
Inspection number	311428
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Mick Megee

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Sophie Barton

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	101
Sixth form	25
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Wilson

Age group	3–19
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2009
Inspection number	311428

Headteacher	Chris Davies
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	12 Lindsay Road Branksome Park Poole BH13 6AS
Telephone number	01202 763697
Fax number	01202 768078

Age group	3-19
Inspection dates	3-4 February 2009
Inspection number	311428

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors together with a Social Care Inspector who carried out an interim inspection of the boarding provision. The interim inspection looked at the progress the residential provision has made with the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection.

Description of the school

Victoria Education Centre and Sports College provides education for pupils with physical difficulties, predominantly cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy. Almost all of the pupils have additional learning difficulties. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the proportion of pupils with severe, complex or profound learning difficulties, and these now make up over half the pupils. About a quarter of the pupils board at the school. In September 2007 the school became a specialist school in sports and information and communication technology (ICT). Most members of the current senior leadership team, apart from the headteacher and deputy headteacher, are new to the school, having been in post since September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Victoria Education Centre and Sports College provides a good education for its pupils. The key factors in the school's success are the caring, individual attention given to the pupils, the good professional teamwork between staff and the effective leadership of the headteacher and her senior team.

Teachers, therapists and support staff work well together in the classrooms and, because of good teaching, achievement is good in almost all subjects in both the school and in the Early Years Foundation Stage. While there is good attention to the individual personal needs of pupils, classroom staff do not always make the most effective use of signs, symbols and objects of reference, which holds back the achievement for those pupils who rely on these additional cues. The very strong provision for sports through the school's specialism means that achievement in physical education (PE) is outstanding, with some pupils successfully competing at national and international levels. The curriculum meets the needs of most pupils well and successfully underpins both their learning and personal development. There is a very exciting range of activities outside of school, particularly in sports, which adds greatly to the pupils' enjoyment of school and brings them into frequent contact with a range of people in the wider world. Pupils love coming to school, as shown by their good attendance and exemplary behaviour. At post-16, where the teaching and the curriculum are not yet fully matched to the needs of the students, achievement is satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support taken together are good. Pastoral support and care are outstanding right through the school. This is the reason why pupils' personal development is so strong. The staff leave no stone unturned to ensure that pupils feel secure, comfortable and have someone to turn to if they are in difficulty. All pupils have specific individual learning targets, but some pupils, even those who are most able, do not always know what they are. One reason for this is that teachers do not always emphasise targets sufficiently in lessons.

All members of the newly installed leadership team are driving the school forward with enthusiasm and vitality. They recognise clearly where improvements have yet to be made and have realistic plans in place to remedy the weaknesses. They have made a good start in updating staff skills, knowledge and resources to meet the challenges of the new population. On the basis of the track record so far, the school's capacity to make further improvements is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The students now moving up into post-16 from within the school have increasingly complex and severe learning difficulties. At the same time, there is a significant number of students of much higher academic ability who join the school in Year 12, from other schools, principally because their parents wish them to develop skills in how to live and travel independently. The school is successful in teaching such life skills to both groups of students, and they all achieve well in these areas. However, the school has not been successful in ensuring that the curriculum fully meets everyone's needs and aspirations. For example, the programme for work-related learning is not yet sufficiently comprehensive and there are few opportunities for work experience. The new head of department has quickly recognised the shortcomings and has already put in place new courses in drama, music technology, ICT and functional skills. There are well advanced plans to ensure that a more comprehensive and effective curriculum is in

place for September 2009. The head of department has also rightly recognised that not all teachers and support staff have yet attained the requisite skills and knowledge to fully meet the learning needs of students with more complex difficulties. Relevant professional development is being provided but teachers have not had sufficient time to assimilate all the new techniques and strategies into their practice.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of the strong teamwork between classroom staff and other professionals, and because of the enthusiasm and commitment of the Early Years Foundation Stage leader. Home visits by the therapists give parents confidence in the staff, and mark the beginning of an enduring partnership between home and school. Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding because they are made to feel special and at home by the warmth and kindness of the staff, and by the effective, individualised programmes that are provided. Although standards are much lower than usually seen at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make good gains from their starting points. The staff carry out a thorough assessment of children's needs as soon as they join the school and then plan an effective, individualised programme to help them make as quick progress as possible. The programmes ensure that children have fun learning, so that they are very engaged and motivated throughout the day. The department has recently introduced a new system for tracking children's progress, but this is too new to have yet made a positive impact on achievement. There is some provision for learning outdoors but it is not suitable for children who use wheelchairs. This restricts free-flow activities, although staff and children make the best of what is available.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The centre provides a good residential service to children and young people, with some outstanding areas of practice.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more effective use of individual targets so that they are emphasised more often in lessons, and known and understood by pupils, where this is feasible.
- Make more effective use of signing, symbols and objects of reference to improve pupils' understanding.
- Raise achievement at post-16 by improving teachers' skills and by expanding the curriculum, particularly to provide more opportunities for learning related to the world of work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although standards are exceptionally low in comparison to the national average, pupils' achievement is good in most subjects. This is because of the individual attention that every child receives from the committed and enthusiastic staff. Achievement in PE is outstanding because of the excellent specialist teaching and resources the school provides. Good resources in ICT, the school's second specialism, mean that pupils achieve well in that subject. There is good achievement in the range of accredited programmes on offer. The very experienced staff ensure that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress. At post-16,

achievement is satisfactory rather than good because the curriculum is not as broad as it could be, especially for the pupils who have the most complex needs. Not all teachers in the school make the most effective use of signs, symbols or objects of reference and this slows down the development of communication skills of those pupils who have difficulties in this area. In other subjects, there is very little discernible difference in the progress made by various groups, although boys achieve slightly better than girls in ICT.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils right across the school express their great delight in their school and speak fondly of their friends and the very helpful staff. Pupils' attendance is good, and their behaviour in the classroom and the playground is exceptionally good. The consistency of approach by staff, within the school's Christian ethos, means that their moral and spiritual development is good. They gain good insight into the lives, beliefs and cultures of others through the very good programme of educational visits and the sports-related work that they undertake in the community. Pupils have a good understanding of how to live a healthy life, and those pupils who are unable to walk recognise the benefit of regularly stretching out in a standing frame, even though, as one said, 'It's a pain.' The close attention and vigilance of staff mean that pupils feel very safe, and they behave very safely, with very little bullying. Pupils' social development is held back slightly by the limited opportunities for learning alongside mainstream pupils. Pupils in the school are well prepared for the future through their good acquisition of basic skills. At post-16, preparation for the future is sound although there are not yet enough opportunities for everybody for learning related to the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Given the small numbers in each class, staff know individual pupils very well and can quickly attend to them if they are in difficulty or discomfort. Teamwork between all the professionals is of a very high standard and ensures that there is little disruption or lost teaching time. Planning for teaching is very detailed, and there is generally a good match between the activities provided and the needs and capabilities of the pupils. Although pupils' individual targets are usually set out in the planning, teachers do not always emphasise them sufficiently in practice. Many teachers make regular use of signs, symbols and objects of reference to assist communication and understanding. This is not the case for all staff, which means that some pupils may lose the meaning of what is being said. Specialist teachers, especially in PE and ICT, have a very good knowledge of their subjects. At post-16, teaching is generally sound but a few staff do not yet have a deep understanding of the teaching approaches required for the increasing number of students with complex needs who are now being admitted to their provision.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's curriculum is enhanced very well by the wide range of educational visits to places of interest, residential experiences and visits from professional musicians and artists. While there are relatively few opportunities for individual pupils to attend mainstream lessons, the

school arranges a great number of joint group activities with mainstream schools, especially in performing arts and PE through the school's specialism. Pupils' personal development is strongly underpinned by the school's Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme. The main school has taken on board the need to update its curriculum in the face of the different profile of the pupils now entering the school. This has led to a good match between what is provided and what individual pupils need. At post-16, the curriculum, although sound, is not yet fully effective in meeting the needs of this group or in its provision for work-related learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff are extremely caring and sensitive in their approach to the pupils and there are good arrangements to ensure they are kept safe. Statutory requirements for safeguarding pupils are met, except for some minor shortcomings in the boarding provision. There is a good daily flow of information to and from home through the home/school books, and parents feel that there is a true partnership with the school. The school ensures that all the relevant professionals come together as a team so that there is a common approach to helping pupils improve quickly. Although pastoral support is very strong, academic guidance is not quite so strong. Pupils all have individual academic targets that are specific and objective, but not all pupils have a clear understanding of what they are or how to achieve them quickly and this limits their achievement on occasions.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The new leadership team and governors receive good support from the parent organisation through its Director of Education who is based on the school site. Together they set out a very clear vision for the future and have gained the commitment from all staff for the changes that have needed to take place. These changes are based on a very thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The evaluation of the post-16 provision has been equally thorough, and the recently appointed senior manager has set out a clear plan for development. Some of the improvements are already having a good impact upon achievement, such as the introduction of an accredited music technology course and ICT awards. However, other planned improvements, such as in work-related learning, will take longer to complete. The governing body provides an effective challenge and critical friendship to the school. The school promotes community cohesion well at all levels, particularly through its sports specialism. Pupils' understanding of rules, rights and responsibilities is effectively promoted through their regular involvement in team sports. The specialism also provides excellent opportunities for pupils to build positive relationships with people from different backgrounds through organised sporting activities out in the local, national and global communities.

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
---	-----------------------	--------------

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?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	2	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	
The extent to which 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	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

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

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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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**

5 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Victoria Education Centre and Sports College, Poole, BH13 6AS

You may remember that there were three inspectors in the school recently. I was the one who you threw snowballs at with remarkable accuracy. Thank you for helping us with the inspection, and for coming to talk to Charlotte and Sophie. Please thank your mums and dads for filling out the forms and for coming in and telling me how much you like your school.

This is what we found out about your school.

- You make good progress in your subjects, and especially in sports where you make excellent progress.
- You are growing up ever so well, your behaviour is first class and you really love your school.
- Your teachers and support staff do a good job of teaching you and making learning fun.
- You have lots of great things to do, and many of you say that PE is your favourite subject.
- Staff really care about you and work well together as a team to give you what you need to be comfortable and feel safe.
- Those in charge of the school do a good job in leading the staff and making sure the school runs smoothly.

I have asked the school to do the following three things to make it even better.

- Make sure that you understand your targets and get the teachers to make more use of them in lessons.
- Make sure the staff help you understand better by using signs, symbols and objects of reference more often.
- Improve the choices and opportunities offered to you when you go into post-16.

Perhaps you could help by trying hard to remember your targets or by asking what they are. You could also start signing to each other, even if you do not need to, so that those who need signing will know what you are saying to each other.

It was great meeting you all, and I wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Mick Megee Lead inspector