

Linwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113961
Local Authority	Bournemouth
Inspection number	311430
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

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	168
6th form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Clarke
Headteacher	Stephen Brown
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2005
School address	Alma Road Bournemouth BH9 1AJ
Telephone number	01202 525107
Fax number	01202 525107

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large school that caters for pupils with a very wide range of special needs, including pupils with severe learning difficulties and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. There are also a high proportion of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. A number of pupils who have previously attended mainstream schools join Linwood in Years 7 to 11. Many of these have not succeeded in a mainstream setting. They often have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The post 16 provision attracts pupils from other settings where there is no appropriate provision for them when they reach 16. There are a small number of pupils who are in the care of the local authority. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.

Pupils enter school with skills that are well below those expected at their age and because of the nature of their special needs, standards are very low.

The school gained specialist school status in 2007 for cognition and learning. It is also a National Support School, the SEN Specialism's National Enterprise School Hub and the Lead Partner in Leading Edge Partnership Programme

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Linwood is an outstanding school. At the heart of this school is the desire to empower pupils to be as independent as possible so that they are well prepared for life when they leave school. Through an exceptionally well planned curriculum, highly committed staff and excellent systems for care, guidance and support, the school is very successful in achieving this. Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development and leave school as sensible young adults who very well prepared for life in society. Parents are overwhelming in their support of the school and what it does for their children. Their views can be summarised by one parent who wrote, 'The school has aided and supported my son beyond my wildest dreams. Brilliant staff with no exceptions.'

Pupils benefit from highly motivated and well trained staff. Teaching is extremely good and has many excellent qualities. Most noticeable of these is the very high level of expertise and understanding regarding pupils' special needs. This is particularly evident for those pupils with profound and multiple difficulties and those with autism. Pupils, regardless of their special needs, make excellent progress in their learning. They get off to a good start in the nursery and their progress in the primary phase is outstanding. Progress for new pupils in Years 7 to 11 is at least good and for those who have been at Linwood for longer, progress continues to be excellent. The very high quality provision in post 16 ensures that by the time they leave school, students have made outstanding gains in learning and skills. The school makes good use of the information it has on pupils' achievements to act quickly where weaknesses are identified. At present, systems for analysing data, although good, are not sufficiently refined. The school has begun to establish clear criteria by which it can judge what is good or better progress. This, however, is at an early stage of development? and, at present, staff are not always clear, when analysing data, whether each pupil has made sufficient progress by the end of each academic year.

There is little doubt that pupils of all ages enjoy school. They arrive smiling and the warm welcome they receive from staff sets a positive tone for each day. The relationships between staff and pupils, and pupils with each other, are excellent. Routines are well established and staff show considerable respect for pupils' dignity in caring for their needs. Pupils are expected to take responsibility for themselves and make decisions, for example about the activities they will do during the day. Pupils have become sports leaders working in mainstream schools and many are involved in music and drama events with local schools. The opportunities for Linwood pupils to attend mainstream schools are exceptional and there are also very good opportunities for pupils in mainstream to benefit from staff expertise through attending activities in Linwood. The school's exceptional links with the local community have enabled staff and pupils to support others. A prime example is the work pupils are doing with the ambulance service in providing a leaflet that non-communicative adults and children can use to show how they are feeling. In return, pupils are being given courses in first aid.

Exceptionally strong leadership empowers and enables those within the school to take on responsibilities and develop confidence and self-esteem. This applies not only to the pupils but also to the staff. Managers at all levels are extremely competent and have a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the school. The very high expectations for pupils is reflected in staff's own expectations of what they themselves should achieve. The school's specialist status has enabled the school to raise the bar even further in what it wants to do better and is enabling staff and pupils to develop further their work with

other schools and providers to bring about change. Governors provide a good level of support and, together with a very committed staff, they ensure that the school is extremely well placed to improve even further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The excellent curriculum in post 16 is firmly based on developing students' living and independence skills. The exceptional range of experiences enables students to make very good progress in their learning. This is reflected in the wide range of accreditation they gain by the time they leave school. The very good focus on improving students' basic skills in literacy and numeracy ensures that they build upon the skills they have already developed. Teaching is of a very high standard. Staff use their knowledge of the students very well to ensure that students' work is well matched to their ability. Through very good teamwork, staff support all students to reach their full potential. The staff provide very positive role models, and the adult atmosphere and good humour within the provision ensures that it is a very age- appropriate setting. The staff expect students to make their own decisions, for example in deciding when they want to have a break and in making decisions about activities during the day. Students carry out their roles sensibly and behave very well when on work experience and working in the community. The care, guidance and support for students are excellent and this ensures students are very well prepared for leaving school. There are excellent opportunities for students to experience college life through taster sessions of six to eight weeks. However, the school recognises that there needs to be more opportunity for more able students to attend college courses on a long-term basis.

Leadership of the post 16 provision is fairly new and has been successful in maintaining and building upon the strengths that were already in place. The senior staff have a very clear understanding of how they want to make further improvements and extend provision and have plans in place to achieve this.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start with standards well below those expected nationally and during their time in the nursery make good gains in their learning. They benefit from good teaching and a curriculum that is well focused on their communication and social skills. As a result, many make very good progress in these areas and progress in numeracy is good. Staff recognise that in other areas of the curriculum, the small steps children make are not always clearly identified and assessment of children's progress does not always recognise the progress that pupils make. This is because the recording of these small steps during the day is too variable. Senior leaders recognise that this needs to be more rigorous in order that the full range of achievements are recorded and are taking action to review systems.

Leadership and management are good and well supported by senior managers. Planning is effective and ensures that activities are well structured and meet the very varied needs of the children. Staff have made good use of the limited space available but opportunities for children to develop their skills through play are limited by the accommodation. Whilst there is an outside play area, it is not easily accessible and cannot be used in all weathers. This prevents staff from making as much use of it as they would want. Plans are being considered to establish an outside covered play area directly outside the classroom.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine systems for analysing data to ensure that the staff are clear about the expected rates of progress for each pupil.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

From very low starting points, pupils make excellent progress in their learning and achieve extremely well. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and those with autism make particularly good progress because they benefit from very strong teaching expertise. Pupils in Years 1 to 6 make very good progress particularly in their reading and communication skills. Pupils' confidence in the use of symbols and signs develops very well so that, by the time, for example, they reach Year 11, they can organise their day through symbols and make decisions about what they feel they will try hardest in and what they will enjoy on that day.

Progress in Years 7 to 11 is very good. Where the school has identified an area for development, quick action is taken, as happened last year, in improving writing. At present, the school is focusing on improving pupils' numeracy skills, which are good rather than very good. Pupils gain a range of accreditation by the end of Year 11, achieving good passes in Entry Level qualifications and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Pupils also gain recognition for their cooking skills through 'Active kids get cooking'. For those students who remain at school and stay on to Post 16, their successes are reflected in further accreditation, for example in ASDAN and unit award courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

From the moment they start school, pupils are empowered to make choices and take responsibility. This they do with considerable enthusiasm. They make decisions about the activities they will do during the day, and plan and organise visits, making use of public transport wherever possible. The school council has considerable say in what goes on in school. A regular feature of the school council meetings is checking on health and safety issues in school and any concerns the pupils may have. They are clearly very conscious of how to keep safe and were concerned, for example, that although teachers insist pupils use the pelican crossing, teachers themselves do not always do so when on their own! Links with mainstream schools provide excellent opportunities for inclusion and pupils work alongside their mainstream peers to organise activities and festivals and participate in a huge range of sports from sailing to golf, climbing and dance.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is excellent. There are very good opportunities for pupils to reflect upon their day-to-day lives. They learn, too, through good links with schools and individuals from other countries, about a wide range of cultures. Behaviour in and around the school is excellent. A small number of pupils have challenging behaviours because of their special needs. Many of these are older pupils who have joined the school later on. At times, they struggle to adapt and this has led to a small number of exclusions. However, it does not take these pupils long to respond to the school's behaviour strategies so that they

settle well, gaining in confidence and developing their self-esteem. Attendance is good and reflects pupils' positive approach to school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Of the many positive features of teaching, perhaps the most remarkable, is the consistent approach of all staff in developing warm and supportive relationships with the pupils. Pupils respond to this very well and are keen to achieve because of staff's high expectations. A strength of teaching is the sense of 'team' that pervades most classes. Teachers and support staff work very effectively together and have a very clear understanding of what needs to be done. This is very evident for pupils with profound and complex difficulties, where staff are quick to note pupils' reactions and work hard to build upon these. For example, a pupil showed real pleasure when recognising the 'can-can' music and staff quickly involved him in keeping in time to the music.

There is a very good understanding of the range of ability in each class and whilst occasionally teachers' introductions to lessons can be too long, the group work that follows is well prepared and makes very good use of support staff. There is a consistent approach to ensuring that pupils have a good understanding of what they will learn during the lesson. Many teachers refer to these during the lesson and there are examples of very good practice at the end of lessons when pupils have to explain what they have learnt. Very occasionally, teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough and the tasks are not sufficiently challenging. This was reflected in a mathematics lesson where a pupil was able to work out the problems quickly in his head but was not set more challenging tasks.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is constantly evolving to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils. It is very well planned and there is a very good focus on developing pupils' knowledge and skills through a themed approach. As a result, there are lots of different activities going on that develop pupils' skills, often without them realising how much they have learnt until they evaluate their learning. The range of accreditation is very good and there are plans in place to develop this even further. Courses such as first aid, transport training and other activities all contribute very well in preparing pupils for life when they leave school. The personal, social and health education programme is particularly effective in enabling pupils to understand about health issues and keeping themselves safe. Exceptional links with other schools do much to enhance the curriculum and provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their personal, social and academic skills. There are excellent enrichment opportunities both during and after school, which pupils greatly value and are involved in.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Procedures for health and safety and the safeguarding of pupils are excellent and ensure that the care and welfare of pupils is extremely effective and given the highest priority within the school. Links with other professionals and provision to meet pupils' medical needs are excellent. Parents comment very positively about this aspect, and one described how staff have undertaken extra training to use medical equipment to support her daughter in school. There is very good support and guidance for pupils when they move to the next stage of their education, whether it is within school or when moving on to college. An important aspect of this is the fact that pupils are very much involved in this process and in making decisions about what they want to do next.

Good records are kept of pupils' achievements, and procedures to support pupils' academic guidance are effective. There are good opportunities for pupils to evaluate their work and check what they need to do next. Where this is used well, for example for the oldest primary aged pupils, pupils respond very well. The marking of pupils' work is detailed and praise is used well. Opportunities are sometimes missed, however, to outline to pupils what they could do to improve their work further. Through its work with mainstream schools, new assessment procedures that assess styles of learning and enable pupils to consider school and themselves have been established. This has been very effective in recognising those older pupils who may become disaffected and is enabling staff to support these few pupils where necessary.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The key strength of leadership in this school is the ability to delegate and empower staff to take on responsibility. Through the Leading Edge project and specialist school status, many staff in the school have additional responsibilities that enable them to work in a range of different settings, supporting staff both in mainstream and in other special schools. There are high expectations that staff will share their expertise within Linwood as well as outside, and good use is made of people's skills. For example, high level teaching assistants run training sessions on information and communication technology for staff.

The school is constantly reviewing what it does and assessing how its work ensures that the Linwood pupils will benefit from all its initiatives. After its first year of specialist status, the school has made good progress in many aspects, although in some respects it has set itself very challenging targets, particularly in terms of pupils' achievements. A lot of work has been done in analysing pupils' progress and the school has started to establish criteria for what it considers to be good, satisfactory or other levels of progress. This is at an early stage but will provide the school with a more objective method of gauging its overall effectiveness and ensure that teachers are better focused on enabling pupils to meet longer term targets. It will also provide the supportive governing body with better information so that it can become even more challenging.

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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	1
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	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

10 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Linwood School, Bournemouth BH9 1AJ

Thank you for making Judith and myself so welcome when we came to visit. We enjoyed talking to you and it was good to see how hard you work. We feel that your school is an outstanding school and that you do extremely well in your learning. Here are some of the most important parts of the inspection report that we thought you might like to know about:

- You really enjoy going to school and being involved in all the activities.
- You develop very good skills in learning how to look after yourself and are very well prepared for life when you leave school
- You like to take responsibility and are very good at organising events and festivals.
- You do a lot to keep fit and work very well with pupils from other schools.
- The school is very good at making sure you are safe and well looked after.
- Your teachers know you very well and have a very good understanding of how you can best learn
- The school is extremely well led and the teachers work hard to do the best for you.
- The school works very well with lots of different people to make sure you are well cared for.

To make the school even better we have asked the school to:

- Improve the ways of checking how well you are doing so that staff can be sure that you are making the best possible progress.

We wish you well for the future and hope you continue to be as responsible and sensible as you are now

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascall Lead Inspector