

Yewstock School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113965
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311432
Inspection dates	11–12 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Megee

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	127
6th form	4
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Billington
Headteacher	John Lineton
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	Honeymead Lane Sturminster Newton DT10 1EW
Telephone number	01258 472796
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Yewstock School admits pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties from across North Dorset. Many pupils have additional, complex difficulties such as autism. Attainment on entry is exceptionally low. Through its outreach programme, the school provides professional support to schools across the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Yewstock is a good school with a number of outstanding features. Strong and effective leadership and management are at the very heart of the school's success. The headteacher maps out the school's future very clearly, based on a good understanding of what the school already does well and what further actions need to be taken. The school has continued to develop and improve since the last inspection in many areas, and through its very good outreach work in Dorset is fast gaining a justifiable reputation as a reservoir of good practice and expertise on which local schools frequently draw. Such developments clearly demonstrate the school's good capacity for further improvement.

The school's success rests too on the effective teaching which is linked to a rich and varied curriculum. Teachers and teaching assistants come to know the pupils very well together in the small groups. They make very good use of this knowledge to see what works best for each pupil, and quickly identify individual strengths and areas for improvement. Teachers make sure that classrooms are exciting places in which to learn, and throughout the school, pupils' work is celebrated in high quality displays. The accommodation difficulties reported at the last inspection, especially for post-16 students, continue to hamper even faster achievement.

Excellent provision in the Foundation Stage means that children make outstanding progress from day one in school. After this very rapid initial acceleration, and as a consequence of the good leadership, teaching and curriculum, pupils' achievement in the main school and for post-16 students is good. Parents are often staggered at the way in which the school forces them to readjust upwards their expectations of their children's potential. As one said, 'My son's progress has been truly amazing since he started at Yewstock 18 months ago. He has really started to shine.' The school has correctly identified that pupils have been doing less well in mathematics than in other subjects, but strategies are already in place to bring about the necessary improvements. Many pupils have substantial communication difficulties and staff work hard to help pupils make good progress in this area. However, not all the strategies are equally effective, and not all staff are adept in making the best use of signing and symbols to assist communication.

Where Yewstock really excels, though, is in the high standard of pastoral care which results in pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. Academic guidance is not yet so strong. Recent changes have meant that many pupils are not sure of their targets or what they need to do to reach them quickly. The school has great links with its stakeholders, local schools and colleges, and work experience providers. The school seeks and values the views of parents and pupils, and as a consequence parents speak about Yewstock being 'one big family'. The school council has a budget of its own and makes important spending decisions under the tutelage of the headteacher and governors.

Pupils' enjoyment of learning is manifest in their good attendance and excellent behaviour. The Friendship Gang plays an important role in supporting younger pupils at playtimes and older pupils frequently resolve issues amongst fellow pupils.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students in the post-16 provision achieve well and are successful in a good range of externally accredited programmes. This is because of the good teaching and good leadership within the

department. There are excellent links with local colleges, through which many pupils successfully transfer to further education programmes when they are 19. Students provide very good role models for the younger pupils and will freely assist pupils who are in difficulties without being asked. Behaviour is exceptionally good. Students adopt a mature approach to their work, and relationships are very strong. The post-16 provision continues to be dogged by the long-standing problems of the accommodation. The provision is contained within one or two rooms, which are cramped and uncomfortable. The school does its best to circumvent these problems by providing off-site activities, but staff work under great pressure to provide effectively for this age group.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children make a fantastically good start to school life because the provision in the Foundation Stage is exemplary. From the very first contact with the family, the school ensures that children settle into school quickly and happily through very detailed and reassuring planning. There are much-appreciated home visits, calls from staff and a gradual and gentle introduction into school life. In this way, the school and the home develop very close and trusting relationships that staff, parents, carers value highly, and which are a crucial strength of the provision. Classroom planning and teamwork are also of exceptionally high quality. Consequently, children are challenged to make outstanding progress in both their learning and their personal development. The excellent curriculum fully meets the children's individual learning needs. For example, an extensive range of strategies and resources is used very effectively to boost children's progress in communication. The Foundation Stage is led inspirationally by the manager, whose enthusiasm and expertise are recognised by staff, parents and children within the school, and who has received national acclaim for her work. It is no wonder that parents write in fulsome praise of the brilliant and very happy start their children receive at Yewstock. As one parent said, 'their level of care goes way beyond that required and I would never leave Dorset now as the care and the education my son receives at Yewstock are outstanding.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all pupils make rapid progress in communication, for example, by making more effective use of signing and symbols.
- Ensure that, where possible, pupils are aware of their targets and what they need to do next to reach them.
- Together with the local authority (LA), improve the curriculum by improving the accommodation, especially for post-16 students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The learning difficulties of the students mean that standards in the school are exceptionally low when compared with national averages. Nevertheless, achievement is good through the main school and for post-16 students, and it is outstanding in the Foundation Stage. Progress is good in nearly all subjects apart from mathematics, where it is satisfactory. Pupils' development in communication is slightly hampered because teachers do not always use signs and symbols to maximum effect.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The inspectors found it remarkable that pupils of all ages socialise and work together so amicably with a very mature sense of fair play. This, alongside their exemplary behaviour, clearly demonstrates their exceptionally good moral and social development. Pupils enjoy coming to school. One parent typically wrote, 'Our son absolutely loves it at Yewstock. When he comes home, he eagerly talks to us about his day's lessons and all that has happened. This makes our whole family very happy.' There are always adults on hand to care for them and to listen to their worries and concerns, and as a consequence they feel safe and at home. Pupils place great trust as well in the school council to look after them when they are outside lessons and to take up concerns and suggestions. Pupils are very safety conscious and intuitively go to each other's aid when they are in difficulty. Most pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and exercise, enjoying fruit and vegetables at break time and taking part in a wide range of physical activities, although a few pupils find it too difficult to resist the crisps and chocolates they have brought from home. Pupils take their responsibilities very seriously, for example, acting as a school councillor or as part of the Friendship Gang. They support the local and wider community very well through a wide range of charity and civic tasks and events. They are well prepared for their future lives because they work well together and are developing a good range of necessary skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers make good use of props in their lessons and this makes the learning enjoyable. In a lesson about aboriginal art, for example, pupils had a go at playing a didgeridoo before trying their hand at decorating using only painted dots. Teachers also make good use of the assessments from previous lessons when planning, so that learning naturally flows from lesson to lesson. Not all teachers identify opportunities for promoting pupils' key skills within lessons, and these can sometimes be missed as a consequence. The school makes very good use of teaching assistants, both to support the teachers and to capitalise on any areas of expertise they have.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Staff work hard to make classrooms very lively places where pupils are eager to learn. One parent wrote, 'My daughter's entire school schedule is geared to her likes and dislikes, abilities and co-operation. How they do this for all the pupils is a miracle but they do it.' Pupils value the good range of resources available to them, and they say how much they enjoy participating in the educational visits and residential experiences. The school provides a good range of enrichment activities, especially in music, drama and sport. Secondary pupils say how they love the mini-enterprise projects. Shortcomings in the accommodation restrict the range of activities

which the school can provide on site, although it does its best to offset these problems by making use of facilities within the nearby towns. This can eat into curriculum time. The school has not yet provided many opportunities for pupils to learn within mainstream schools, which could further support their development of independence skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Yewstock staff expect a great deal from the pupils in terms of their behaviour and development. The pupils know this and try to meet these expectations by working hard and trying to do their best. The small groups mean that staff have an in-depth awareness of what each pupil needs and what works best. Good assessment processes lead to detailed information on pupil progress; this is used to provide suitable support and to work out challenging targets. The school does not yet do enough to ensure that, where this is feasible, pupils know their targets and understand what they need to do to reach them. The pastoral guidance for pupils, on the other hand, is stunningly good. As one parent wrote, 'As a teacher myself, I can only be humbled by the huge dedication shown by all the staff.' There is fabulous teamwork among all the staff and other agencies to support pupils, and particularly those with additional medical and physical needs. The school very efficiently maintains all necessary welfare and safety procedures.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher is absolutely committed to providing the very best for the pupils. He, along with the senior leadership team, continually and conscientiously reflects on how to drive up achievement even further. As soon as areas for improvement are identified, action plans are put in place and acted upon. The improvement in the last four or five years, including the spectacular provision in the Foundation Stage, is testimony to this. The leadership team knows the school's strengths and areas for improvement because the school's monitoring systems are effective. However, some of the monitoring information is not organised or summarised well enough to be easily understood by all the staff and stakeholders.

The governing body is effective. It is well aware of issues for improvement, especially the accommodation issues. Under the guidance of its new chairperson, it is holding the school to account well for the standards it achieves.

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?	2	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	2	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	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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

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?	2	2
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	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
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	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for the lovely welcome we received when we visited your school. I would like to thank the school council who met with us. I am very pleased to tell you that you go to a good school that has some outstanding features.

There are lots of good things about your school. These are the most important ones:

- You make good progress in school, especially in the superb Foundation Stage.
- You enjoy going to school and behave very well indeed in lessons and around the school.
- Your teachers and classroom staff do a good job of teaching you.
- You have an exciting range of lessons and things to do.
- All the adults look after you very well in school.
- Those who lead and manage your school, including governors, work hard to give you a really good education. To make your school even better, we have asked your headteacher, teachers and governors to:
 - look at ways to encourage you to communicate even better
 - make sure you all know your targets
 - give you more space in which to learn.

Keep up the good work

13 February 2008



Dear Pupils

Inspection of Yewstock School, Sturminster Newton DT10 1EW

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Keep up the good work

Mick Megee
Lead inspector