

St Elizabeth's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117665
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312669
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	60
6th form	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sister Annette Clemence
Headteacher	Mr Philip Poulton
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2005
School address	South End Much Hadham Hertfordshire SG10 6EW
Telephone number	01279 844270
Fax number	01279 843903

Age group	5–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Elizabeth's School is part of an international organisation founded by an order of Catholic sisters known as The Daughters of the Cross of Liege. Situated within St Elizabeth's Centre, the school shares a campus with a specialist college for students aged 19 to 25 and with provision for older people with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school serves the needs of pupils from a large number of local authorities and nearly all the pupils are boarders. All pupils have a statement of special educational need and are funded by local authorities. The school has a long history of educating and caring for pupils with complex epilepsy. In recent years the school has extended the range of pupils it accepts to include those with autistic spectrum disorders and with profound and complex needs. Many pupils have been out of school following exclusion from other establishments before joining St Elizabeth's. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The learning difficulties and disabilities of the pupils mean that attainment on entry is well below the national average overall, though there is considerable spread of attainment. The school is designated for pupils aged five to 19, but at the time of the inspection there were no pupils under the age of nine and most were aged 14 to 19.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that provides an exceptional level of care for its pupils and enables most to achieve well. The vast majority of parents express a very high level of satisfaction with its work, especially with the way they are kept informed, the quality of care provided for their children and the positive effect the school has on their development.

Pupils receive an outstanding level of care, guidance and support in school and within the boarding provision. Teachers, teaching assistants, care staff, nurses and a large team of therapists and other specialists work seamlessly, serving the medical and personal needs of the pupils. Largely as a result, pupils' personal development is outstanding. Parents say that they 'cannot thank the staff enough for enabling and empowering' their children to become 'happy and confident, knowing that they are valued'.

Most pupils make good progress towards the targets in their individual learning plans, though their learning difficulties and disabilities necessarily mean that standards are well below those found in schools nationally. The school provides well for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and those with autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils with profound and complex needs make satisfactory progress overall but staff do not consistently match activities to the next steps in their learning. This is largely because they have less expertise in working with these pupils and because the co-ordination of provision for this group is at an early stage of development.

At the last inspection, pupils' achievement was found to be unsatisfactory. Since that time, the school has made outstanding improvement to reach a position where achievement is now good overall. It has done this by transforming its assessment procedures and improving the quality of teaching. The introduction of individual learning plans that involve teachers, care staff and therapists has provided a strong basis for closer working between teachers and care staff. Learning opportunities are matched well to most students' needs at post-16 and satisfactorily to those lower down the school. The boarding provision supports pupils very well in developing a range of independence skills but some opportunities are missed for promoting their learning, for example in literacy, by ensuring stimulating resources are available in all the sitting rooms.

The school is led and managed well. The Principal, described by parents as a 'brilliant' and 'inspirational' leader, has displayed exceptional drive and determination in moving the school forward and remedying weaknesses identified at the last inspection. As one parent put it, 'his enthusiasm, like ripples in a stream, reverberates through the school'. He is supported well overall by other staff with management responsibilities and by governors. A great deal of work has been done to strengthen management systems and this has enabled the school to improve rapidly on a number of fronts. Self-evaluation is too detailed, however, so that staff are not all focused enough about their role in school development. Nevertheless, the school gives good value for money and it is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school provides well for students at post-16. Personal development and the care, guidance and support given to students are outstanding. Students are confident and those who are more able respond very well to opportunities to take responsibility. Students achieve well in response to teaching that is generally good and to a curriculum matched well to their needs. Students have good opportunities to take accredited courses, to undertake work experience and benefit

from a range of additional activities available through the St Elizabeth's Centre. Team Enterprise, whereby students come together to design and make products for sale – with more able students doing this by forming and running a limited company – makes a significant contribution to their achievement. Provision at post-16 is led and managed well. As in the school as a whole, staff are more skilled in working with students with moderate learning difficulties than with those who have profound and complex needs.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 8

Pupils' experience in the boarding provision makes a good contribution to their development and the school meets fully the National Minimum Standards. The leadership provided by the Head of Care is good, with outstanding management of care. Staffing levels are good and the induction of new staff is well developed. Staff are highly skilled at managing behaviour and risk assessment is very thorough. Monitoring systems are strong, including the involvement of governors in regularly checking the quality of provision. New purpose-built accommodation, opened at the beginning of this year, and the refurbishment of much of the existing accommodation has done a great deal to provide high quality accommodation for all pupils. Insufficient learning resources are provided, however, within a number of the residential units to interest and stimulate pupils, and staff are not fully aware of how to promote pupils' learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of pupils with profound and complex needs by increasing the skill of staff in meeting their needs and strengthening the co-ordination of this aspect of the school's work.
- Extend the learning opportunities provided within the residential accommodation, so that the 24-hour curriculum fully supports the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Sharpen self-evaluation to make it more manageable and to ensure that all staff share a common vision and have a sense of responsibility for school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Most parents believe that their children are making good progress and others refer to the 'huge', 'sustained' and 'obvious' progress that their children have made since joining the school. Throughout the school, pupils make good progress overall in personal, social and health education, life skills and in acquiring independence skills. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties and with autistic spectrum disorders achieve well in most areas of the curriculum, including literacy and numeracy, but those with complex and profound needs do less well than other pupils. Pupils at Key Stage 4 and post-16 make good progress in their accredited courses. These mostly involve working for accreditation through ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network), Towards Independence and AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) unit awards. The most able pupils make good progress, for instance, writing reports for the school magazine and studying a small number of GCSE courses. Throughout the school, pupils do particularly well in physical education and many gain awards in swimming.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils display very positive attitudes to school and frequently show a high level of enjoyment in response to the activities provided. Behaviour is good and there are many examples of pupils who have made outstanding improvement in their behaviour since joining the school. Attendance is outstanding: parents say that their children are excited when approaching the school and that they want to attend even when they are unwell. Pupils have a good awareness of healthy eating and take part in an outstanding variety of physical exercise. They feel very safe and supported, and have excellent relationships with the staff. Pupils feel that their views are listened to: the school council is very active and pupils regularly contribute their views through meetings in the residential units. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, supported by an onsite chaplain and sisters from the convent as well as strong links with local parishes. Pupils learn about other traditions and cultures and regularly contribute to fundraising. They are prepared well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

There is some outstanding teaching and the school has moved teaching and learning on from satisfactory at the time of the last inspection to a point where most teaching is good. Teachers are skilled in asking questions, set interesting work and generally use their teaching assistants effectively. There is, however, a lack of consistency in the use of switches and other communication aids for use by pupils with profound and complex needs and less intensive and focused interaction than these pupils need. The school has put a great deal of emphasis into improving its assessment and target setting systems and both are now good. The establishment of individual learning plans that span education and care has been central to this improvement. Parents are closely involved in setting and reviewing their children's targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is satisfactory overall and good at post-16. There are good opportunities for pupils to take accredited courses and the school keeps these constantly under review. A wide range of activities on the campus and within the local community in the evenings and at weekends enriches pupils' learning. Throughout the school, there are extensive opportunities to take part in physical activity, frequently led by specialist sports teachers and coaches. Provision for personal, social and health education is good and the school has been successful in gaining the Healthy Schools Award. Residential staff have recently taken over responsibility for life skills but procedures are not yet fully in place to ensure that they are aware of the next steps in each pupil's development. The school has, rightly, identified the need also to do more to develop pupils' literacy skills in residential units. Close work with therapists supports the satisfactory learning opportunities for pupils with profound and complex needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils. Individual care plans are very thorough and the school makes excellent provision for pupils with medical needs. Support provided by a large team of therapists is supplemented by the care of specialist nurses and visiting medical consultants in neurology and epilepsy from Great Ormond Street Hospital. There are thorough systems to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and protected. The management of pupils' behaviour is exceptionally effective and staff are highly skilled in quickly defusing any situation that has the capacity to get out of control. As a result, the school has a calm and orderly atmosphere, despite having a number of pupils who were previously excluded from other schools. Wherever possible, pupils are involved in the review of their own progress and the school plans carefully to ensure that they make a smooth transition when it is time for them to leave. The school works closely in partnership with parents and has an open door policy that they appreciate very much.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Since the last inspection, senior managers have made good use of external consultants to supplement their own lesson observations in order to improve the quality of teaching and to raise pupils' achievement. The role of subject co-ordinators has developed well overall and there is some good practice in the way findings from subject audits are analysed and recorded. A wealth of monitoring information is now gathered and the school has collected two years' worth of data from which to set targets and form judgements about pupils' progress and school effectiveness. Future developments are planned very thoroughly. At a whole school level, however, there is insufficient analysis of all the information at senior managers' disposal to identify the few essential actions that would make the difference between satisfactory and good or good and outstanding provision. The role of the governing body has developed significantly since the last inspection. The chair provides very effective leadership and governors visit the school to gather information for themselves. The school takes stakeholders' views into account and has forged some productive links with other educational establishments, as well as working closely with those local authorities that most frequently refer pupils to St Elizabeth's.

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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 boarding provision	2	
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	

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	2	
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	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?	3	2
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?	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
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	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 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Elizabeth's School, Much Hadham, SG10 6EW

Thank you for making me feel welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed my visit and now I am writing to tell you what I found out about the school.

St Elizabeth's is a good school and it has improved a lot in the last two years. I can see why so many of your parents are pleased with how much it helps you. All the teachers and other adults care about you and look after you really well. I was pleased to see how happy you are at school and how well you get on together, like one big family. Many of you are making good progress in your work because the teaching is generally good. Those of you who are older have good opportunities to gain qualifications such as unit awards, and I was especially interested to hear about the work you do in team enterprise.

Mr. Poulton does a really good job in running the school, and he and the other managers want to make it as good as possible for you. I have asked them to:

- find better ways of teaching those of you who find learning most difficult
- use the time you spend in the residential units to help you learn more new things
- make some changes to the way they check how well the school is doing.

I am sure you will go on enjoying the time you spend at school and I wish you luck in the future.

With best wishes

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector