

St Luke's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117671
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312670
Inspection dates	4–5 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis

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	9–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	162
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Colin Walker
Headteacher	Mr Paul Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2004
School address	Crouch Hall Lane Redbourn St. Albans Hertfordshire AL3 7ET
Telephone number	01582626727
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large special school for day pupils. Almost all pupils have moderate learning difficulties, although an increasing number have additional needs such as those related to autism or challenging behaviour, or more severe learning difficulties. Most pupils with autism are fully included in the school's work, but a small group with the most severe needs, currently four, attend the school's autism base for pupils aged 11 to 14. The school is responsible for the educational provision at Forest House, a children and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) unit based at a hospital 12 miles away. Specialist provision for pupils who are deaf is also based at the school; this provision is managed by the headteacher, although the pupils are on the roll of a local school for the deaf. Almost all pupils have statements of special educational need and most are from White British backgrounds; very few have other ethnic origins. There are twice as many boys as girls. Pupils come from a range of socio-economic circumstances and a few are in public care. The school has a number of quality marks and awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Luke's School is a good school that provides good value for money and this is how it sees itself. It provides a high standard of education and care. The governors and senior staff know well where its strengths lie and what it needs to do to improve further, because its self-evaluation is good. The school is well led and managed. It is extremely well focused on its mission of 'learning for life', constantly searching out new courses and opportunities for pupils to apply their learning in the community. Its provision reflects this well. It embraces and is often a lead school in new developments locally and regionally, such as in extended school provision and sports partnerships. Its partnership working with other agencies and schools is excellent and promotes very well indeed pupils' well-being, their understanding of each others' needs, community involvement and disability awareness.

The recent reorganisation of the senior leadership team and middle managers has strengthened the school and has placed it in a strong position for even more improvement. The headteacher and senior team complement each other very well, ensuring that the high aspirations and vision that they all have for the school and its pupils are delivered in practice. The governors' and school staff's determination to be even better and to meet the need of every individual is reflected in the challenging targets set and the careful monitoring of pupils' progress in all subjects. Governors have a good understanding of the school's work. However, the current format of the school development plan does not enable them easily to monitor the impact of the target-setting and spending decisions on standards and achievement.

The school meets pupils' needs well. Although standards are low, these are the result of the nature and extent of pupils' learning difficulties. Pupils make good progress and achieve well. This is in all subjects and for all the different groups of pupils, including those at Forest House, and is because of good teaching and learning. A good and wide range of learning experiences meets individual pupils' needs well. High standards of care and support and excellent partnership working with other schools and external agencies ensure pupils keep safe and feel valued. However, there are a few inconsistencies in practice, particularly in relation to how teachers plan to meet the different needs of pupils and share with them in lessons what they need to learn to do next.

Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils feel safe and know the school is helping them to learn. Those with challenging behaviour make good progress in managing the negative aspects of their behaviour and working in cooperation with others. This is because most staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and manage them well and there are good arrangements to encourage improvement, through celebration assemblies and awards. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community. They help to run the school bank, raise money for charities and participate in local competitions. There are many and varied links with other local and international schools and these are very successful in developing pupils' awareness of other countries and cultures. Almost all parents are very happy with the school's work, many remarking on the caring and dedicated staff and on the 'remarkable progress' their children have made.

There has been good improvement since the last inspection. In particular, the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) for the youngest pupils and for English in Key Stage 3 has improved considerably. ICT is now used well to support all pupils' learning.

Really good web and internet links form an important part of pupils' broader learning and community awareness. The school has a good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all teachers take account of the information that they have about pupils' learning needs and strengths to plan and teach their lessons, including the ways in which they share targets with pupils and help them to understand what they need to learn to do next.
- Link school target setting more tightly into the school development plan so that the impact of the school's actions on standards and achievements can be more explicitly monitored and demonstrated.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good but overall standards remain low. However, a few pupils do achieve standards closer to pupils of their own age, particularly in subjects such as mathematics, science and art. Pupils regularly take GCSE in these subjects, sometimes attaining C and D grades. A good range of qualifications is available to help all to succeed at their own level, including vocational qualifications in areas such as life skills and land studies. All pupils, including those in Forest House, make equally good progress from their starting points because the teaching and learning are good. Where pupils do not make the progress expected of them, the school can explain this convincingly; for instance, where pupils have had extended absence or periods of illness. There are particular strengths in pupils' progress in basic literacy and numeracy, in speaking, listening and communicating, and in their self-confidence and the ways in which they present to others. This is because the school prioritises these skills and engineers many situations in school and in the community when pupils can apply them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school's positive approach and high standard of care for each individual ensure that pupils develop into sensible and well-behaved young people. Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy attending. This is reflected in their very regular and improved attendance, which is now good. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously, suggesting changes and using its budget to improve facilities and resources. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The recent introduction of family groups has helped to develop the school's 'family feel' and reduce bullying. The school has done everything it can to deal with name-calling and misbehaviour on the transport and has good systems in place to deal with any incidences of bullying. Pupils say that when bullying does occur, their teachers react swiftly and manage to 'sort it out' most of the time. Behaviour is good, although the number of fixed term exclusions last year was relatively high. They were incurred by a handful of older boys, most of whom have now left. Most of the pupils get on very well with each other and lessons take place in an informal and calm atmosphere. The new 'family' pastoral groups are proving highly effective and supportive to new and more vulnerable pupils; older pupils say they make them feel more responsible for each other. Pupils of all ethnicities and faiths feel equally valued and welcome. Pupils adopt safe practices and healthy lifestyles well. Their good personal qualities and sound basic skills prepare them effectively for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers work hard to plan interesting, motivating lessons. Lessons are calm and purposeful because staff manage pupils well and have good relationships with them. Occasionally, pupils are restless in lessons and not all staff deal with this quickly and effectively. The best learning takes place in lessons when teachers use the assessment information they have about pupils to ensure that everyone is learning and included. For example, in a geography lesson the strategies to be used to include a pupil with autism were clearly identified, there were different objectives for different pupils and the pupils were regularly told how well they were doing in moving towards their individual education plan and the lesson targets. The school's current emphasis on assessing and monitoring pupils' learning is beginning to pay off, although planning for pupils' different learning needs is still inconsistent.

Teachers use a good range of methods to support pupils' understanding. However, photographs, visual timetables, key words and symbols with text are not available wherever a learner with autism or learner with more complex needs is placed; these are missed opportunities to support learning and independence. Teaching assistants are well briefed and deployed to support individual pupils and groups. Staff give good praise and feedback to pupils, but do not all involve pupils in reviewing their learning in lessons. Most staff maintain a good dialogue with parents, for example through home/school books, although some parents feel this could be more consistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum is reflected in the award of several quality marks such as the Silver Artsmark and an award for careers education and guidance. Pupils undertake a wide range of externally accredited courses, including GCSEs and BTEC Skills for Working Life. There is an appropriate emphasis on developing pupils' basic skills, including life skills, literacy, numeracy and ICT and a wide range of clubs, physical and sporting activities. Pupils take part in these enthusiastically. Opportunities to practise basic skills through a wider range of subjects are being developed. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education and citizenship is good. Pupils receive guidance on sex and drug education and how to deal with bullying. Pupils in the junior department follow a European awareness course in addition to their broad and highly relevant primary curriculum. Excellent links with external agencies, including Connexions, mean pupils are well prepared for life after school. Pupils undertake two work experience placements as well as a transition course run in conjunction with Oaklands College that helps to prepare older pupils for education post-16. A wide range of visits, visitors, residential and day trips and themed weeks help to bring learning to life in school and outside. They support pupils' transition and inclusion into the broader community very well indeed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils and almost all parents speak highly of pastoral care and their confidence is well placed. A few parents want more consistent support from the school to address their concerns. Staff are already planning for development here. They are looking carefully at the information they

provide and how they might involve parents even more. Learning mentors provide very good personal support for pupils who face particular problems. Day-to-day health and safety, and child protection procedures are secure. The school has strong links with community organisations and these are used well to ensure that individual pupils receive specialist support as and when the need arises. Academic guidance is satisfactory. The school is developing this aspect of its work as a main priority. Pupils are becoming increasingly familiar with reviewing their progress in subjects and with helping to set their targets for improvement. However, this emphasis is relatively recent and not all staff and indeed pupils are yet using this information and these reviews to best effect. There are excellent relationships with external agencies and, through these, the school ensures that pupils have access to additional support when it is available. For example, it makes effective use of the limited speech and language therapy time available, ensuring that recommendations are followed through by teaching staff and in 'social use of language' groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management, including at Forest House, are good. The governors, headteacher and senior leadership team are ambitious for the school and its students. Governors and the leadership team are very focused on ensuring each pupil is included and has the opportunities they should. Monitoring and evaluation are successful in diagnosing the school's strengths and weaknesses, and the school improvement plan identifies all the key areas for development. The school is highly focussed on the individual pupil and sets targets that are challenging in all subjects, and for all aspects of its work. New initiatives are clearly driven by a determination to improve pupil achievements further. Some, such as the reorganisation of the ways in which the school collects and analyses its information about pupils' achievements, are not yet fully in place. The school uses its resources well, for example, by ensuring that staff are trained effectively to use new ICT equipment or adopt new ways of teaching. The current move towards gaining specialist school status exemplifies senior managers' determination to strengthen the school's provision and to contribute further within the local community.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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
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
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

6 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Luke's School, Redbourne AL3 7ET

Thank you for welcoming Mrs Smith and me into your school when we inspected it last week. Thank you too for being so helpful when we talked with you. It was good to hear how much you liked coming to the school and enjoyed your lessons. We were pleased to hear that you felt it was really helping you to learn and to behave and that you trusted your teachers to sort things out if you were ever teased or bullied.

We agree that your school is a good school. We think like you that the teaching is good and helps you to make good progress. Mr Johnson and the senior teachers work hard to make sure that you have new and interesting things to do and skills to learn. This means that when you leave the school you are well prepared for college and work. We think that the way that you work together to raise money for charity and to do different jobs around the school is excellent. You have really good opportunities to go on visits and residential trips both in England and abroad. All this helps you to understand the world around you and other people's needs very well indeed.

We have asked the governors, Mr Johnson and the teachers to think about two main things.

- How teachers can plan for and provide different work for some of you that is more matched to your levels and how they help you to understand exactly what you need to learn next.
- How they plan to improve the school so that it is even better and you all achieve even more success.

With best wishes and thank you again.

Sue Lewis

Lead inspector