

Meath School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125478
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315244
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2008
Reporting inspector	James Bowden

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	54
Appropriate authority	The proprietor Mr Joe Eagle
Headteacher	Ms Janet Dunn
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	Brox Road Ottershaw Chertsey KT16 0LF
Telephone number	01932 872302
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Meath is a day and residential school for learners with severe speech, language and communication difficulties. It is one of two schools owned and run by the national charity, I CAN. It provides a programme of integrated therapy, education and care. The recently opened Communication Skills Centre provides additional services of independent assessment, outreach work, training and consultancy.

Learners are funded by a range of local authorities from across the country. All have a statement of special educational need for language and communication difficulties. Many, however, have other special needs such as autistic spectrum characteristics, emotional and behavioural difficulties and moderate learning difficulties. There are generally far more boys than girls on roll, as is commonly found in such schools. Although most learners are of white British heritage, almost a fifth comes from a wide range of ethnic minority backgrounds. A maximum of 15 learners at any one time benefit from opportunities provided in the residential block for up to four nights per week.

The school has its own governing body that reports to the I CAN Board of Trustees. It gained National School Healthy Status in December 2007. The headteacher is responsible for both care and education within the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Meath School seeks to create a safe but challenging environment and community, which provides high quality education, therapy and care, where individuals are valued, achievement is celebrated, and all learners are enabled to communicate and learn as effectively as possible. In this, it is exceptionally effective. The significant strength is the highly collaborative approach of the multi-disciplinary specialist staff involved. These include teachers, speech and language therapists, an occupational therapist, learning support assistants (LSAs), residential care staff, catering staff, a family social worker and part-time medical support staff. The overwhelming majority of the 65% of parents who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire are supportive of the work of the school. One, expressing the sentiments of many others commented, 'Our child has flourished since being at Meath and has reached heights and attained goals we would never have thought possible.' The school works extremely well with others to promote their own learners' well-being as well as other learners within the local school confederation, in which it plays a significant role.

Achievement is outstanding across the school because of the total care and education package it offers. Although standards on entry are extremely low because of the extent of learners' language and communication difficulties, the progress they all make is excellent. Learners make especially fast progress in developing communication skills, using signs and symbols very effectively, and make significant improvements in their speaking as they get older. Annual reviews of learners' progress towards the appropriate and challenging targets set for them showed that, in 2007, 70% made good or outstanding progress against targets set in English mathematics and personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE).

Learners' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Learners improve their self-esteem, their independence and learn to interact positively with one another and the adults they work with. Throughout the inspection, they were keen to welcome and communicate with the inspector. Learners' behaviour, which can be difficult when they start at Meath, improves considerably as they move through the school and their attitudes to learning develop really well as a result. Attendance is well above the national average for all schools in England, there being no unauthorised absence during the previous school year.

The early focus by all staff is on improving learners' capability for learning when they arrive. This is very effective and improves learners' language and communication skills, as well as their appetite for education. In most lessons, learners clearly want to learn and be actively involved. In an outstanding music lesson, there was a wide variety of activities, which involved all fully throughout and developed their knowledge and understanding of pulse and rhythm very well. However, in some lessons, the pace is a little slow and too much teacher direction means that some learners drift off task because they are not fully involved, for example, in pair and small group work. Teaching overall is good but learners, nevertheless, make outstanding progress because of the wide range of additional support and other opportunities that extend their achievement. The curriculum is excellent because it meets fully the needs of all learners and the whole day is regarded as learning time. It is very effective in providing a language focused learning environment across all contexts throughout the day. The residential section provides a seamless continuation of the daytime activities thus all learners can, during the course of the year, experience a twenty-four hour curriculum that includes a wide range of valuable enrichment activities. The school provides high quality care, guidance and support for learners, striving to gain the best for them whatever the time of day. This includes both pastoral and academic

support and guidance, which is supported very effectively with individual education plans (IEPs).

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. Rigorous self-evaluation and very well focused development planning has ensured the school has continued to improve and develop further since the previous inspection. There is excellent liaison and collaboration between all the staff, which ensures that every learner really does matter and makes excellent progress. Governance is particularly effective and focused. In light of the improvements and developments since the previous inspection, the excellent quality of care and education provided and its improving track record the school has excellent capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Boarding provision is excellent. The bright, airy, cheerful and very well maintained accommodation meets fully the relevant National Minimum Standards (NMS). The most recent Ofsted Residential Special School Report judged provision as outstanding with no recommendations for further improvements. The Independent Care Standards Monitor visit earlier this month was similarly positive. Learners are safe, happy and very well supervised. They are very appreciative of the extra activities and enrichment opportunities provided for them. One commented, 'This is very well organised and there is lots to do.' Residential care staff and education staff work extremely well together in order to ensure that every learner makes the best progress possible throughout their time at the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Broaden the range of teaching styles to ensure all learners are more actively involved in learning in all lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Learning is individualised with each learner having individual targets, initially for improving their learning capability and for language and communication skills. As these skills improve, learners make excellent progress across the 'P' levels - levels that are well below the standard National Curriculum levels in school. Standards remain very low, compared to the national picture, at the end of Year 6 but many learners improve by two 'P' levels or sub levels of the national Curriculum over a year and many progress to levels 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum in aspects of literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology (ICT).

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Because of the exceptionally high level of individual support from all who work in the school, learners' confidence and personal development grows in leaps and bounds. Learners eat fresh and healthy food prepared on site and understand the importance of physical activity. Approximately 80% of the present Year 6 learners are able to swim 25m unaided. Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They take an active part in the life of the school both on and off-site through involvement in the school council and local community projects. Some are also enabled to spend part of their timetable in local mainstream schools, which broadens their experience of education. Learners' transition to the next stage

of their education is eased because of the progress they make in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and in the use and application of ICT. Their group working skills, however, are less well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Each class works with a designated speech and language therapist, working in partnership with the teacher and LSA. As a result, learners receive a high and very effective level of all round individual support. All staff know their learners very well and ensure their needs are met very well by planning that focuses on both targets in IEPs as well as attainment targets in literacy, numeracy and other subjects of the National Curriculum. Learners' progress is reviewed regularly by all staff and targets modified when appropriate, parents being well informed of this. All staff are very effective in providing positive oral feedback to learners during lessons. Though there is some outstanding teaching, the style of delivery in a few lessons is too teacher dominant, the pace is a little slow and learners are not actively involved enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is exceptionally well matched and modified, where appropriate, to meet the needs of learners, increasing numbers of whom have a range of other special needs beyond severe speech, language and communication difficulties. It is very effective in improving learners' skills in literacy and numeracy as well as developing learners' personal skills and attributes. Some learners join specific lessons in a mainstream setting whilst some learners from mainstream schools join lessons and themed activities provided by visiting groups at Meath. An extensive range of enrichment activities both on and off-site enhances greatly the quality of provision and education learners receive.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an exceptionally strong, collaborative, caring and supportive environment where learners feel safe, develop their personal qualities and make outstanding progress towards the targets set for them in their lessons and IEPs. These include careful assessments of each learner in relation to their personal needs and the impact these may have on other people in the school. Learners' achievement is at the forefront of the school's ethos of care and education. It carefully assesses learners when they arrive in order to ensure they are placed in an appropriate group, which takes account of their capabilities in language and communication. Targets are set and reviewed regularly by all staff to support progress and learners are increasingly becoming involved in assessing their own progress and knowing the next objectives for learning and personal development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher, her senior leadership group and those with other posts of responsibility set a clear direction and sense of purpose in providing high quality care and education. Though some aspects of self-evaluation are a little cautious, there is a very astute awareness of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. This is as a result of careful monitoring and evaluation of performance at all levels, including that of all learners. Though there are no national comparisons available for learners at Meath, the school sets its own challenging targets to ensure they achieve as well as they can in relation to 'P' scale progression. Resources, including staff, are managed particularly well to support improvements, thus achieving excellent value for money. Both the governing body and the board of trustees act very effectively as critical and supportive friends of the school.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	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	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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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
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	1
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

06 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meath School, Chertsey, KT16 0LF

I recently spent two days in your school, visited you in lessons, chatted to individuals, saw you involved in other activities around the school and spent some time in the residential block. I really enjoyed my time at the school and appreciated being able to have a formal chat with a small group of you from Year 6. I was pleased to hear how you enjoy your education and the care and support you receive. I also know that your parents are very pleased with the education you receive.

Meath is an excellent school. This is because:

- the headteacher and her senior staff lead the school exceptionally well
- during your time at the school you make excellent progress in your learning and personal development
- all the adults who work with you make sure you are safe and extremely well cared for
- all the adults who work with you are really dedicated, have your best interests at heart and want to make sure you will do well in the future
- the curriculum and other activities in both the school and the residential block make your education very interesting.

However, there is one thing that could be made better for you:

- in some lessons more opportunities are needed for you to work as pairs and small groups.

Once again, many thanks for making me feel so welcome and good luck for your future.

Best wishes,

James Bowden

Lead Inspector