

Friars School

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	130957
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	315677
Inspection date	25 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Kathryn Burdis HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	132
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Stockham
Headteacher	Lynne Stuart
Date of previous school inspection	20 April 2004
School address	Friars Close Wellingborough NN8 2LA
Telephone number	01933 304950
Fax number	01933 304951

Age group	11-16
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Amended Report Addendum

Report updated to resolve formatting inconsistency

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Introduction

On this one-day inspection, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the progress and achievement of pupils with different learning difficulties; the impact of leadership and management on school improvement in the context of pupils' changing needs; and the effectiveness of the school's behaviour policy. Evidence was gathered from discussions with the chair of governors, the senior leadership team and pupils, from a scrutiny of the school's records and from a small sample of lessons. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. The school's own analysis of leadership and management, as given in the self-evaluation form, was overly generous, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's other assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This large special school takes pupils with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It caters for more pupils with severe and complex needs than at the time of the last inspection. All pupils have a statement of special educational need and attainment on entry is well below average. The majority of pupils are White British. As part of the local authority's inclusive schools review, the school federated with its partner primary special school in 2005. This arrangement was not successful and the school experienced an uncertain period with considerable changes to leadership and management over a three-year period. In January 2007, the governing body decided to end the federation. All appointments to the new senior management team, including the headteacher, have come from staff 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: 2

This is a good school where pupils enjoy learning and gain in confidence and self-esteem. Pupils, governors and almost all parents speak very highly of the excellent support and responsiveness of teaching and non-teaching staff. The school has maintained many good aspects in the quality of provision identified at the last inspection, including good teaching and a relevant curriculum, but the current management team is newly formed and not yet fully effective in evaluating the work of the school to drive further improvements. The school reports good partnerships with outside agencies providing for the health and social well-being of pupils.

Pupils achieve well, making good progress between the ages of 11 and 16. Almost all achieve external accreditation in entry level, ASDAN or GCSE courses at the end of Key Stage 4. These outcomes demonstrate success in curricular subjects and illustrate good achievement in life skills and preparation for life after school. The staff know how well their pupils are doing in English, mathematics and science because their knowledge and skills are carefully assessed when they first arrive and their progress is tracked regularly as they move through the school. In this way, staff can demonstrate that individual pupils or specific groups such as those with autistic spectrum disorder or moderate learning difficulties make good progress over time.

Achievement is good because teachers plan each step in the learning process carefully and prepare activities that will engage and extend pupils. Individual targets are set and teaching assistants work in an effective partnership with teachers to support pupils in achieving their goals. Very good provision for information and communication technology (ICT) supports learning well, and a current display of Year 11 achievements illustrates good work in art, drama, food technology, science and community service. Achievement in key skills is promoted through ASDAN accredited courses.

The school places a high priority on promoting independence and self-help. Pupils are very clear about their own targets and the system used for assessing and recording how well they are doing. Consistently well-planned lessons provide a broad curricular experience whilst ensuring pupils with a range of learning difficulties enjoy taking part. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to discuss what they are learning, practise their speaking skills and increase their confidence. Teaching assistants and mentors provide very good support for learning and help pupils to understand and manage their behaviour. A focus on improving attendance has reduced absence rates and the rate of unauthorised absence, at 2.4%, is below the national average for similar schools.

Pupils have a clear understanding of how to stay healthy, what constitutes healthy and unhealthy food and how to keep fit through their participation in the sports offered. Provision for sport is a particular strength of the school, and many lunchtime and after-school clubs extend opportunities. However, this is limited for some pupils who rely on school transport to get home. The school cares very well for its pupils and all procedures for safeguarding are in place. As a result, pupils report that they feel safe at school and confidently identify their mentor as someone they could turn to for help. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are usually good and they have confidence in the school's approach for managing inappropriate behaviour. Pupils talk with great insight about the arrangements for helping them to behave well and many demonstrate a mature understanding of the needs of others, especially those whose learning difficulties include unpredictable or challenging behaviour. Pupils make a positive contribution to their school through the active school council. The successful junior sports

leader course provides opportunities for older pupils to support younger ones in team sports, both at Friars School and local primary schools. Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The headteacher provides good leadership and has a clear focus on raising achievement and improving provision. However, the new senior management team is not well established and delegation of responsibility to middle managers is underdeveloped. Whilst subject leaders monitor curricular planning well and identify subject action plans, they rarely evaluate the quality of teaching to identify where they can support improvements in the delivery of their subject. The governing body has played an active role in supporting the school during a period of uncertainty but has only recently started to receive performance information in a way that enables governors to challenge the work of the school. Consequently, the systems for monitoring and evaluating provision are not yet fully effective, although external validation such as the achievement of the Healthy Schools award, ICT Mark, Career Mark and Sports Mark confirms strengths in specific areas.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, extending the role of governors and ensuring clear delegation of responsibility to senior and middle managers.
- Explore further opportunities for sport and leisure activities for those pupils unable to stay for after-school clubs due to transport arrangements.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	2
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	3
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

26 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Friars School, Wellingborough NN8 2LA

Thank you very much for making me so welcome at your school. I enjoyed talking to the school council, observing you working hard in lessons and meeting some of you at break and lunch time. You clearly like your school and are right to be proud of your achievements.

I agree with those of you who told me that the staff are very good at responding to your needs and helping you to learn and enjoy school. The good teaching and interesting activities help you achieve as well as you do. The Year 11 work on display in the hall showed me just how well you do, especially in science, art, music and sport. Your parents told me how good your school is in encouraging you to be independent and develop the confidence to do things for yourselves. I could see that this was true.

I was very impressed with how well you behave in lessons and how much you understand about each other's behaviour and feelings. It was clear to me that you work hard to make a contribution to the success of your school and are developing a good awareness of how to take care of the environment.

Your school is led well by Mrs Stuart, and Mr Baker plays an important part in the smooth running of the school. I have asked them to work with other staff to find new ways of finding out about the strengths of the school and identify how they could make your school even better. I have also asked them to try to find ways of encouraging more of you to attend after-school clubs.

With best wishes

Kathryn Burdis Her Majesty's Inspector