

Mapledown School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101397
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	323455
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	61
Sixth form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Kath Delaney Wetherill
Headteacher	Mr Steve Carroll
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2005
School address	Claremont Road Cricklewood London NW2 1TR
Telephone number	020 8455 4111
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school provides for students with severe and complex learning needs. An increasing number of students have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) alongside medical and care needs. Over half of the students are over 16 years old. Two thirds of the students are from differing minority ethnic backgrounds, and almost half of the students are at the earliest stages of learning English. Half of the students are entitled to free school meals. The school has gained many nationally recognised awards in recognition of its work. Since September 2008, the school has achieved specialist school status in Cognition and Learning.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Mapledown is an excellent school. The school's leaders have ensured that there has been continuing and sustained improvement since the previous inspection, when the school was also judged to be outstanding. The quality of teaching is excellent and is a major strength of the provision. The teachers in each of the three 'learning zones' of the school, that is for those students with PMLD, those with severe learning difficulties and those with autism, have developed their specialised expertise to a very high level. The school's curriculum is outstanding because it has been carefully adapted to match the learning needs and abilities of each student. Lessons are exceptionally well planned as a result, and tailored very effectively to provide interesting but challenging activities for each individual. The well-trained learning assistants provide excellent support from which the students gain confidence. As a result, the students enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. Because of their learning difficulties, the standards reached by the students are exceptionally low, but all of them do well in their studies and most make outstanding progress.

Provision for students aged 14–19 has many excellent features, such as the arrangements to teach students about the world of work and prepare them for the transition to adult life. The students make excellent gains in their levels of maturity and self-confidence, helped by outstanding programmes to teach them 'life skills'. The school, however, does not yet provide a wide enough range of courses to enable some of the higher-ability students to reach their potential.

The students thrive within the caring and supportive ethos of the school. They feel safe and well supported. A strong emphasis is placed on their personal, social and health education (PSHE). As a result, their personal development is outstanding. They learn to remain healthy, to keep safe and to behave well. They value the school, and this is evident from the excellent relationships they have with staff and from their very good attendance. The students arrive at school every day with smiles on their faces. Parents are very happy for their children to attend, knowing they will be safe, that they enjoy their lessons, and that the school has high expectations of their progress. One parent's comment was typical, 'They put the needs of each and every pupil at the forefront of all decisions.'

The headteacher's work has been outstanding in maintaining and continually improving standards. An able management team has supported him, and together they have been very effective in leading staff in the drive to improve students' achievements. A strength of the school lies in the confidence staff have that they will be supported and encouraged to extend their knowledge and skills. Teachers have been very successful in identifying and improving any less effective elements of provision. For instance, the school has recently overhauled the procedures for tracking the students' performance. The school's governors and leaders seek out and act on the views of all connected with the school, not least the students themselves. The governors' level of support and challenge to the school is excellent, and has been very influential in the drive to improve standards even further, as shown, for example, in the recent recognition of specialist school status. The school evaluates its work extremely well and has an outstanding capacity to improve further. Consequently, it gives excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has developed very good integrated provision for all the students aged 14–19 years. As a result, the students have a longer and richer experience of preparation for adult life, including work experience, and a wider choice of vocational and creative learning experiences, such as in art and music. Students make outstanding progress in their personal development because of excellent procedures to help them gain experiences of adult life, particularly in their visits to outlets in the Brent Cross shopping centre, where they are welcomed by a range of well known retail organisations. The staff effectively promote an adult ethos and mature behaviour. Excellent teaching results in many students making outstanding progress, particularly in their communication skills. This gives the students confidence to express opinions and, as far as possible, to assert their independence. However, achievement is good overall because the range of courses leading to qualifications is too narrow to allow the higher-ability students, in some cases, to reach their potential. The school has developed good links with local colleges and almost all students leave at the age of 19 years for further education courses.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the range of courses, which lead to qualifications, for students aged 14–19, so that all students can achieve the highest standards of which they are capable.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

All students achieve very well and many make outstanding progress, although because of their learning difficulties their attainment remains far below that expected of mainstream students. Those making outstanding progress are from all sections of the school population, including the students with severe learning difficulties, the students with PMLD, and those with autistic conditions. The students who are at the earliest stages of learning English receive especially good and well-targeted support and, because of this, they make progress at the same rate as the other students. There is no evidence of underachievement by any group of students or individuals. Students make particularly good progress in learning the basic skills of communication, literacy and numeracy. Most students make excellent progress in meeting their challenging individual education plan (IEP) targets in basic skills and in personal development. This has a clear impact on their excellent overall achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The students' excellent progress in personal development reflects the school's strong management of behaviour and its emphasis on moral and social values. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The students always express their pleasure and support when one of their friends does something well. They experience an exceptionally rich variety of cultural experiences from musicians, artists and performers from all over the world who visit the school. The students gradually develop an excellent awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles through the many opportunities they are given to take part in physical activity during the day, at lunchtimes and after school. They make very good gains in their social skills through the many communal activities. Students in 14–19 education make excellent progress in acquiring valuable life skills through work experience and effective careers

provision. Students feel safe within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere, grow in confidence, and know what is expected from them. Behaviour and attendance are outstanding because students' enjoy school so much. Those students who were spoken to were emphatic that they felt free from bullying or unpleasantness, and that they really looked forward to coming to school. The many parents who returned questionnaires were unanimous in their unqualified praise for the school and its impact on their children's lives. Parents used phrases such as, 'Pastoral care is excellent' and 'The school has worked wonders with my son'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching standards are exceptionally good throughout the school and this has a very substantial impact on the students' achievement. Teachers capture each small step in progress that students make, and this leads to very well-focused targets for each student's further improvement. They know their students very well, and this enables them to plan interesting well-paced lessons. As a result of excellent planning, the support staff have a clear understanding of what the students should learn in each lesson and of the best way to ensure that they do so. As a result, they are able to give a high degree of focused individual support to each student. The students like their teachers and the support staff, enjoy their lessons, and consequently try their best. The very effective emphasis on developing communication skills greatly enhances their involvement in learning activities, and their progress. The management of behaviour is excellent. Students understand and respond to clear routines. When a student's behaviour becomes unacceptable, it is dealt with calmly and with understanding and support for the student involved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Students enjoy a carefully constructed curriculum which is very well adapted to their needs and which is rigorously monitored for its effectiveness. There is a range of very good programmes for students in 14-19 provision, and particularly good arrangements for work-related learning. Programmes in PSHE underpin much of the school's work, and these make a substantial impact on the students' achievement in personal skills and on their knowledge about the advantages of a healthy lifestyle and about their own safety. The school's excellent provision for the development of students' communication and other basic skills is extremely effective in promoting the students' confidence and their access to learning opportunities. There is a wide range of activities which take students out of the classroom, such as their visits to the British Museum and to Docklands, teaching them to behave appropriately in the community. This adds substantially to their social skills, their self-confidence and their interest in learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The safeguarding of students is the school's highest priority. It maintains excellent links with outside agencies, such as therapy and other health professionals, to help ensure that all the students' needs are fully addressed. The generous staffing means students have many opportunities to communicate with favourite adults, and that there are supportive relationships. The students are proud of their successes, and like the way that the staff tell them how well

they are doing in both their work and personal development, and reward them with praise and encouragement. Parents receive very high quality information about their children at annual review meetings, and the students are fully involved in agreeing their own targets. They clearly know how to improve their work. Students receive very good advice and support as they are about to leave school. There are good links with local colleges, which result in almost all students taking advantage of further education courses when they leave school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school's leaders have continued to drive up standards of teaching and student achievement since the previous inspection. A strength of the school lies in the rigorous and effective way in which managers monitor, evaluate and improve on every aspect of the school's performance. The school's internal procedures for self-evaluation are exemplary. These are complemented by the stringent criteria set by outside bodies, who have confirmed the uniformly high standards with many awards for the quality of the school's provision. There are very effective procedures, for instance, to measure and improve staff performance. Communication within the school is excellent. Staff feel fully consulted, involved and valued. There are excellent procedures to support new staff, and the quality of professional training is outstanding. These factors make a considerable contribution to sustaining students' outstanding achievement. Governors work closely with individual staff and they rigorously monitor the school's strengths and areas for development.

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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?	1	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
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	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
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	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
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**

17 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Mapledown School, London, NW2 1TR

Not long ago I came to the school to see how you were getting on and whether I could suggest anything to make the school better. You made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you in your classrooms and at lunchtime. Thank you and well done. I could see that you all enjoy school very much. I was with you for two days. That was long enough for me to realise that you go to an outstanding school. Here is a list of some of the things I particularly liked about your school.

- You work hard and make excellent progress in your work and in your personal development.?
The many different people at the school look after you very well.
- You do many interesting activities including ones that help you become independent, make choices, and learn all about different places and customs.
- All the adults work hard to give you as much help as possible, and they are very good at preparing interesting work for each of you.
- Your headteacher runs the school very well and everyone, including your parents, gives him strong support.

I think the school could improve even further if the older students had a wider range of qualifications to aim for. All the students, because of that, would have a better chance to show just how well they can do.

Please thank your parents for all the comments they made on the questionnaires.

Best wishes to you all.

Yours faithfully

Mel Blackband

Lead Inspector