

St Ann's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102698
Local Authority	Merton
Inspection number	323674
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Kay Charlton

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	73
Sixth form	10
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Zafar Hasnain
Headteacher	Mrs Tina Harvey
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bordesley Road Morden SM4 5LT
Telephone number	020 8648 9737
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Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Ann's is designated as a special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties. In recent years there have been changes in the complexity of pupils' needs on entry and many now have profound learning difficulties that are often linked to autism. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. They come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, mainly White British and Black African. The proportion of pupils who have English as an additional language is above average. Many of these are at the early stages of learning English. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in the Nursery. The school has achieved a number of awards, such as Sportsmark, Healthy Schools and Artsmark. In 2011 the secondary department is due to move to new accommodation, at which time the school is to become a Centre of Excellence.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Ann's School provides outstanding education for its pupils. It has continued to go from strength to strength since the last inspection because of the determination of the senior staff to ensure that the pupils get the best education. Parents make overwhelmingly positive comments, such as 'I count my blessings that my child attends St Ann's.'

At the heart of the school's vision is the belief that all pupils, whatever their background or ability, will be successful. Teaching and learning are excellent and, as a result, pupils' achievements are outstanding. By the time pupils leave, they will have attained a range of nationally accredited qualifications at pre-entry and entry levels which, given their starting points, represents excellent progress. Staff work very well as a team and they use praise very effectively to improve pupils' self-esteem, concentration and behaviour. Assessment is a key strength of the provision. Staff capture every small step of each pupil's progress and, in turn, set challenging and well-focused targets for further improvement. This careful attention to detail ensures that staff plan well-paced activities that fully match pupils' needs. All staff make excellent use of resources, such as information and communication technology, to motivate pupils and ensure that lessons are enjoyable. They are very successful in using specialist communication techniques, such as signing and pictorial systems, to ensure that pupils of different abilities are appropriately challenged at all times.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They make substantial improvement and this success is based on a consistent and positive approach by staff that rewards pupils' every effort. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and the calm and purposeful lessons. They appreciate the wide range of extra activities, such as horse riding and swimming. They are proud of their school and each other's achievements, as seen in an assembly where they presented their work and applauded those who had won a local sports competition. Bullying is rare and pupils know what to do should it occur. They learn to use times of quiet reflection very effectively and show that they respect those with different needs as well as those with different backgrounds and beliefs. The school's strong links with others provide extensive opportunities for pupils to make an excellent contribution to the wider community. The care they receive is of a very high quality; pupils trust the staff and are clear that 'The teachers will help us if we are sad'.

The headteacher gives an extremely strong lead and provides the commitment, drive and enthusiasm to ensure that the school continues to improve. With the exceptionally strong support of her two deputies, she gives a clear sense of direction. A climate of teamwork has been developed among all adults so that everyone works to a common purpose. They work very effectively in the present cramped accommodation to ensure that pupils receive a very high quality of education. Excellent induction and staff development programmes ensure that staff are continually refining their skills to meet pupils' needs. Governors challenge the school very effectively and ensure that it provides excellent value for money. The school's self-evaluation is robust, with extremely rigorous and discerning monitoring by the headteacher and deputies. The information gained from monitoring is used very well to target those areas most in need of improvement. There is, however, still further to go in using the monitoring information about pupils' progress, to compare the school's effectiveness with the national picture. This is to ensure that the school, and governors in particular, can be certain its performance is as good as it can possibly be. The school's track record of improvement shows that it is extremely well placed to improve in the future.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The progress and achievements of students in the sixth form are excellent because of outstanding teaching and learning. Staff have improved the curriculum since the last inspection, for example by extending the range of accreditation. As a result, it is extremely well matched to students' aspirations and abilities. Students develop the skills needed for life extremely well, a particularly good example being the Friday Food sessions where they make and sell food to the staff. There are excellent opportunities for students to work with others, for example in activities with local schools, colleges and theatre groups. In all of these, students receive well-tailored support that matches their needs very closely and ensures that they become confident and as independent as possible. Students have a voice in decision making. They have presented their ideas about how to ensure that the facilities in the new accommodation match their needs and the school has acted upon them. The leadership of the sixth form is highly effective.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children achieve exceptionally well in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of the close attention given to their needs. Staff are experienced in working with children of this age and their teaching is excellent. They place great emphasis on children's personal development and all children make substantial gains in developing independence and the social skills needed for their future learning. Staff are sensitive and care for children extremely well. They work closely with parents to make sure that the children settle well and that there is a good degree of continuity between home and school. The leadership is excellent. It ensures that the provision fully meets the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, with very effective use of outdoor provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of monitoring information about pupils' progress to compare its performance with the national picture and be certain it is doing as well as it possibly can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

As a consequence of excellent teaching and care and guidance, pupils invariably meet or exceed their challenging targets. The high quality of support for pupils ensures they make outstanding progress. Standards are well below those in mainstream schools but, given the nature of the pupils' learning difficulties, this represents excellent achievement. The strong focus on the development of pupils' language and communication skills pays off because it has a significant and positive impact on their achievements throughout the curriculum. It also ensures that pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as their peers. The school has widened the range of courses available for pupils aged 14 to 19 since the last inspection and this has enabled them to gain a wider range of nationally accredited qualifications, notably in vocational areas, both at age 16 and at age 19.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

All pupils make significant gains in developing self-esteem, confidence and independence because staff value them as individuals and have high expectations of each one. This is evident in the exceptional contribution of the older pupils to drama productions such as 'Oliver'. Pupils learn to think through their actions and their effects on others. Behaviour is excellent and pupils of all ages work and play together in a harmonious atmosphere. Attendance is good. The overall attendance rate is affected by the medical conditions of some pupils, but the school makes every effort to encourage all to attend regularly. Pupils understand about a wide range of cultures, for instance through many visits out of school and through activities linked to events such as Black History Month. They are confident in giving their views because they know their ideas are respected. All pupils make an extremely strong contribution to the wider community through their work with other schools, notably in sports and drama, and also by a wide range of activities with theatre and arts groups. They show good awareness of the need for a healthy lifestyle, as reflected in the Healthy Schools and Sportsmark awards. All pupils pay excellent attention to acting safely and look after each other well. They develop the skills needed for their future economic well-being extremely well and all move successfully on to the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The school's rigorous programme of monitoring teaching and learning has been highly effective in bringing about improvements in classroom practice since the last inspection. Assessment is much improved and staff set finely tuned targets to guide pupils' learning. Teachers and support staff all play a vital role in helping pupils develop the confidence they need to succeed. The excellent relationships established between staff and pupils, and the consistent approach to managing behaviour, form the bedrock of pupils' successful learning. Staff make highly effective use of not only a range of communication techniques but also sensory experiences to enhance pupils' learning. In the exceptionally high-quality lessons observed, the benefits of all staff being fully conversant with these specialist techniques was evident for all to see, for example, in pupils' excellent responses to the sensory teaching techniques used in a Key Stage 4/5 lesson and to stories such as 'It's Cold Inside' and 'Walking in the Jungle'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school's excellent curriculum is much improved since the last inspection. It is very well tailored to the range and complexity of pupils' needs, with a wide range of therapies provided. A strong emphasis on personal and social education and language, literacy and numeracy underpins much of the school's work and this has a significant impact on pupils' achievements in all areas. The wide range of enrichment activities, such as visits to the theatre, museums, a local sports centre and a farm, adds to pupils' enjoyment of school. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to learn how they should act in the wider community and art, music, drama and physical education are particularly strong features of the provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's comprehensive tracking of each pupil's progress is used very effectively to organise extra support for individuals if needed. It is also used to set targets that increase pupils' determination to succeed. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and the care pupils receive is exemplary. Parents and carers are seen as partners in their child's education and the school works with them very well and with a wide range of outside agencies to support pupils' development. The way pupils demonstrate their progress at their annual review meeting using digital photography and videos of themselves at work is very impressive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher and two deputies have established an ethos where everyone is continually striving to improve the provision so that pupils get every chance to succeed. Excellent systems for staff development and training have enabled improvements in teaching and learning to take place since the last inspection. In turn, this has ensured that pupils' achievements have improved. Middle leaders have developed their skills well and they take on their responsibilities with enthusiasm. The governing body is highly effective. It plays an important role in ensuring excellent community cohesion by helping to raise the profile of pupils with special educational needs. They act extremely effectively as the school's critical friend and everyone in school is very clear about the school's strengths and those areas that need to be improved. Consequently, the school is aware of the need to make more effective use of its monitoring information about pupils' progress. This is so that everyone, and governors in particular, can check that it is doing as well as it possibly can against the national picture.

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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	1
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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	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	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	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	1
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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

11 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Ann's School, Morden, SM4 5LT

Thank you for making me very welcome on my recent visit to your outstanding school.

I enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work, and I was very pleased to be invited to a meeting of the school council. I could see that the staff look after you extremely well. Your behaviour is excellent and I know that you like coming to school very much. You also like to keep healthy by being involved in lots of physical education including swimming. You told me that the staff help you and I could see that you like your lessons. I could also see that you make excellent progress because of the excellent teaching you receive and that your lessons are fun. All the extra activities you do, such as visiting the theatre and a local farm, add to your enjoyment and also make your school excellent.

I know that the staff have plans to make St Ann's even better and you can help them by always trying your hardest. I have asked them to make sure the school checks even more carefully that it is doing as well as it possibly can.

Yours faithfully

Kay Charlton

Lead Inspector