

Whitefield Schools and Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103109
Local Authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	323757
Inspection dates	7–8 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy HMI

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	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	300
Sixth form	44
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	Mrs Deborah Malcolm
Headteacher	Mr Niels Chapman
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Macdonald Road Walthamstow London E17 4AZ
Telephone number	020 8531 3426
Fax number	020 8527 3613

Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Whitefield Schools and Centre provide for pupils between the ages of 3 to 19 years who have profound, severe and complex learning needs and/or disabilities. Almost half the pupils have learning needs associated with autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils have statements of special educational needs (or are being assessed) and a high proportion use alternative or augmentative methods of communication. The establishment consists of three schools, each with its own head of school: Sensory Impairment and Learning Difficulties; Communication and Interaction, Primary; Communication and Interaction, Secondary. There is also a centre for professional development and information, and a family support and outreach service. The school is in wave one of the Building Schools for the Future programme and a new block is currently being built. While this is happening, 80 secondary students are being educated in available provision on another school site.

Over half of the pupils who attend are from the school's own local authority, with others travelling daily from other London boroughs and neighbouring counties. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average. The largest group is White British but the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is much higher than average, with the next largest groups being Black/Black British and Asian/Asian British. The proportion for whom English is not a first language is higher than average; of this group the highest numbers come from Punjabi- and Urdu-speaking backgrounds. Attainment on entry is significantly below the national average. Boys outnumber girls by three to one.

The organisation has gained the Artsmark Gold Award, the Financial Management Standard in Schools and a number of other awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'It's an exciting place to be, there are not many places like this in the world!' These words, spoken by a member of the staff team, sum up this exceptional school. It is strongly led by the headteacher whose vision and commitment to excellence is shared by the leadership team and the staff. Together they create a community in which everyone is a learner, pupils make outstanding progress, and the drive for improvement is evident. With very few exceptions, parents appreciate the quality of care and education that the school provides. This is reflected in a comment from one parent: 'I'd give them 20 out of 10!'

A key factor in the pupils' outstanding progress is a curriculum that is tailored to meet the needs of this very complex school population. The school is not afraid to adapt new initiatives and statutory requirements to create a curriculum that fully meets the needs of all its learners. As a result, from the very early stages of their school career pupils are able to develop and make excellent progress as they build upon each step of learning.

Robust systems are in place for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning at a whole-school and departmental level. There is much outstanding teaching and the school's investment in professional development for all staff raises the quality of teaching and learning even further. Teachers use resources and technology well and opportunities for innovative teaching and individualised learning are rarely missed. Relationships between pupils and staff are extremely good, contributing to pupils' enjoyment of lessons. Staff place an evidently strong emphasis on providing extremely effective care, guidance and support. Thorough systems of tracking and target-setting are in place to monitor and guide pupils, and whenever possible they are involved in evaluating their own progress. Reports to parents are detailed and informative but occasionally contain too broad a description of progress made, so that it is unclear just what good or outstanding progress really means.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is evident. Pupils demonstrate that they feel safe and trust the staff who work with them. Personal development and well-being are very strong, positively promoted through the school's emphasis upon developing social skills and supported by its holistic approach to meeting individual needs. With encouragement, pupils are willing to take risks; they make the most of opportunities to dance, move and swim and to carry out responsible jobs, such as helping within the classroom. As a result they develop the independence and resilience that will help them in future. As one older pupil said of the school, 'It changes people's lives. It's very special because it helps those in need to achieve as much as everyone else.'

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors provide clear direction and manage the school very effectively. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development, are ambitious in their planning and have demonstrated that they are committed to continuing improvement. The chair of governors summed this up as she reflected, 'We're all driving it forward, every one of us!'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the post-16 provision reflect the excellent leadership that is evident in the rest of the school. Teaching and learning are outstanding overall with the best sessions offering learning opportunities that are individualised, teaching methods that provide challenge and pace, and activities that are purposeful and fun. Assessment and feedback are

effective in developing skills, knowledge and understanding. The excellent curriculum for post-16 students builds on the equally good one found in the rest of the school. The focus is appropriately on life skills and independence, and students can follow a range of different curriculum pathways depending on their ability. Good opportunities to develop appropriate skills are provided and accredited through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and through the development of key skills. In 2008, four students completed ASDAN short course modules, 31 gained accreditation for the 'toward independence award' with three reaching the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness Levels 1 and 2. Three students gained accreditation for life and living and two gained Grade C in GCSE mathematics. This represents outstanding achievement in relation to students' capabilities and starting points.

The school makes strong links with support agencies, colleges and work-experience providers. As a result, excellent arrangements are in place for students to receive the guidance and experiences they need to prepare them for moving to the next stage in their lives. High-quality care, guidance and support for students and their parents enable good decisions to be made about their futures.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children's entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is handled sensitively and carefully. Staff communicate closely with parents and Nursery settings to gather information about each child and this leads to their carefully structured induction. Teachers assess the children's skills and abilities during the first few weeks of the year, and use this information to prepare individual education plans which are in turn used to plan high-quality and appropriate learning experiences.

Through imaginative, lively and skilful teaching children make outstanding progress in their learning and development. All staff consistently encourage children through visual and verbal praise when they achieve a target, for example 'good listening', or 'well done, you made a choice'. Excellent use is made of the curriculum to bring learning alive. For example, the story *Handa's Surprise* was used to engage children in learning new words and making choices, as well as giving them outdoor experiences by actually travelling to the market by public bus to buy fruit for sharing. Children with sensory needs had a wonderful time singing 'I hear thunder' and 'Pitter patter raindrops' while enjoying the sensation of fans blowing misty water over them. Playfulness and fun are inherent features of lessons, within a structured environment that supports children's emotional and physical needs. Pictorial timetables are used well to give children a sense of routine and order. Detailed knowledge of each child's individual needs together with careful nurturing by experienced staff ensure that exceptional care is taken with the safety and welfare of the children. Close liaison with external agencies ensures that children's physical needs are met. Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Leaders rigorously monitor the progress of children, and review the provision to ensure children receive high-quality education and care.

What the school should do to improve further

- Fine-tune the school's existing good practice in reporting, to ensure that parents are given detailed information about what their child has learnt, understands and can do in a way that makes clear how much progress has been made.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Although levels of attainment are significantly below national expectations, achievement overall is outstanding. Processes for assessment, tracking and monitoring of progress are exemplary and ensure that the progress of both individuals and cohorts is analysed, gaps identified and effective action taken. For example, the school's own analysis indicates that although boys consistently score higher than girls at National Curriculum levels, this is not significant when the range and level of need for each group is taken into account. Although the average scores obtained by Asian pupils are consistently lower than other groups, these pupils generally have a higher level of learning difficulty and/or disability in this school. However, the school is not complacent. It makes very good use of available information to measure its success at both a national and local level so that it has a very clear idea of the impact of its provision upon standards and achievement. Pupils achieved exceptionally well in 2008 and school-generated data indicate that pupils are on track to achieve challenging targets for 2009.

For all pupils, success is celebrated at every stage. Pupils make progress through the P levels towards the early levels of the National Curriculum and, where appropriate, beyond. A small proportion of pupils reach the levels required for GCSE and Entry Level Certificate and a few occasionally continue their studies through to AS and A level. Other awards, such as those obtained through ASDAN, provide alternative external accreditation. In 2008, four pupils achieved GCSE Grade C to G in mathematics, and one in science, additional science and art and design respectively. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make excellent gains in their learning. At post-16, students achieve similarly well and have benefited from an increase in the range of accredited courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school ensures that pupils enjoy their education, that they develop exceptionally well and that they are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives. Pupils' independence and confidence are vigorously promoted in school and also in the many activities they engage in within the local community. The school's very focused approach to helping pupils' general development leads to exceptional improvements in their social and communication skills. This, in turn, helps pupils' preparation for transition into mainstream education as appropriate and for their future lives after school. Pupils are encouraged throughout their learning and other activities to talk and think about healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. This focus on health is threaded throughout the curriculum. For example, pupils learn about healthy eating through preparing and cooking healthy balanced meals; older students follow an appropriately designed module on sex education. All participate in carefully designed physical activity which is available in and out of school. Attendance is generally good. Where pupils are absent, this is usually for medical reasons.

Pupils make excellent progress spiritually, morally, socially and emotionally. They foster close friendly relationships with each other and with staff. They are open, welcoming and justifiably proud of their school. They are encouraged to take responsibility; older pupils are actively involved in the school community, helping younger pupils and contributing to the school council. Excellent behaviour is evident in pupils' understanding of each others' difficulties and needs. This helps them to consider others and to develop self-esteem through understanding their

own importance in the lives of other people. Through many visits, practical activities and discussion, pupils develop an excellent awareness of the world beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Excellent professional relationships among the staff contribute to a strong and cohesive team approach that ensures the needs of all pupils are met. The success of the teaching lies in the commitment of class teams to provide enjoyable and interesting activities that relate closely to the needs of pupils. Where these are not of the highest quality, senior leaders move swiftly to take action and bring about improvement. This outstanding team of experienced and well-trained staff has the knowledge and confidence in the best approaches to use to support different learning needs, such as pupils with communication difficulties, challenging behaviour, sensory impairment and medical conditions, using a wide variety of signs, symbols and prompts very well. As one parent commented, 'The staff are very friendly and conscientious, and highly skilled in dealing with complex needs.'

Pupils thrive within the calm, well-organised and purposeful learning environment. Teachers and their assistants adeptly spot the smallest sign that indicates a pupil's response to the learning activity, and a member of the team intervenes quickly to support learning or maintain good behaviour. Day-to-day assessment of pupils' progress is extremely thorough, and provides excellent information on which to plan future activities. Excellent use is made of sensory materials to calm and relax pupils when necessary. Outstanding use of information and communication technology (ICT) engages and enthral pupils in their learning while keeping them constantly reminded of their achievements. Pupils with a wide range of needs respond with engagement and enjoyment. As a result they make outstanding progress and achieve the best that they can.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Lively, innovative curriculum design makes this an outstanding curriculum which succeeds in its aim to develop confident, successful learners who can build relationships and take an interest in their community. The school bases its curriculum on early years principles including communication, skills, knowledge, creativity and personal development. Within this, a particular strength is the development of ICT that strengthens delivery of the curriculum. There are three effective broad levels of planning; pre-formal, semi-formal and formal, using strands to break each element into small steps. The curriculum is not defined by age, but by need and achievement; pupils may therefore move from one level to the next at any time in their schooling. The success of planning is due to the excellent assessment and record-keeping, often involving the pupils themselves. This enables staff to build individualised programmes of study that address the needs of all pupils.

Progression routes are clear. Post-16 students have excellent opportunities to undertake a range of appropriate accreditation, which now includes GCSE. The school makes productive use of the Every Child Matters agenda and has audited its practice, celebrating successes and using an action plan to fill the gaps. For example, enrichment was identified as a key area for development. As a result of actions taken, many visits give pupils wider world experiences, and imaginatively constructed themed days challenge and excite all learners. For example, on the

theme of 'Time' pupils followed a time machine which had been built the previous day with an artist in residence. Through this, they took a route through a wonderland of stimulating dance, song and colour that consolidated their previous learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support given to pupils are major strengths of the school. This is because the monitoring and collation of pupils' personal and academic progress are exceptional. Pupils each have meticulously compiled and detailed records of progress. These include their own assessments as well as individualised targets that are regularly reviewed and adjusted.

Pupils' health and safety is paramount in this very secure and safe environment. Risk assessments are thorough, and undertaken in all aspects of the school's work. Relevant and regularly updated training gives all staff confidence to manage pupils' medical and behavioural needs consistently and effectively. The excellent ratio of staff to pupils is very well directed. The huge investment in the continuing professional development of all staff has a clearly evident impact on pupil's learning. The school has developed a strong team of experienced teaching assistants who provide excellent support to teachers. Teaching assistants are well and flexibly deployed, and this is regularly reviewed. Pupils are constantly encouraged and challenged. The staff are very skilled in anticipating when pupils may need additional support and intervene calmly and appropriately. Pupils' needs are therefore met in a dignified way, usually within the classroom setting, while keeping any disturbance to others in the group to an absolute minimum.

Where appropriate, pupils have regular placements in mainstream schools. Practical work-based experiences are available with college links, and independence and life skills accredited courses result in good arrangements to help the pupils understand the options available to them when they leave school. Parents are strongly appreciative of the excellent provision for their children. For example, one parent wrote, 'My son has made excellent progress despite multiple and severe disabilities, he loves school and I love his school and his teachers too. They do a fantastic job.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership of the school is characterised at all levels by a commitment to equality and diversity which ensures that each child fulfils his or her potential. The headteacher provides committed leadership and has continued to move the school forward since the last very successful inspection. With the support of an able senior leadership team, he has successfully created a management structure in which all staff are undoubtedly accountable for their work. The school has a very good understanding of its strengths and areas for further development and makes full use of monitoring and evaluation for all aspects of provision. This has led to strategically focused actions, particularly with regard to developing its role within the community, including support for other schools and families as well as its own. Its contribution to community cohesion is outstanding and the school's influence is felt as far afield as India and Pakistan. Innovative use has been made of resources, particularly in the introduction of new technologies, so that the school provides a rich and stimulating environment for learning.

Arrangements for safeguarding are secure and the school does much good work in involving other services in order to provide additional support for pupils and their families. In striving to

deliver the most relevant and appropriate education for all its pupils, the school is rightly aware that contact and continuing dialogue with all parents will continue to be of great importance as the school goes from strength to strength. Parents are generally kept well informed and the family support team makes every effort to ensure that links are made and kept. Reporting is thorough and detailed and meets in full the requirements for reviewing statements of special educational needs. However, terms such as 'pleasing' or 'very good' in reports to parents are not always helpful in describing exactly how much progress has been made.

Challenging targets underpin the pupils' outstanding progress. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities diligently and effectively and the chair of governors has introduced a new level of challenge as well as support. As a result, the governing body systematically holds the school accountable and is well placed to be a part of the next steps of this dynamic organisation's development. The school has excellent capacity for continuing improvement.

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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

01 September 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitefield Schools and Centre, London, E17 4AZ

Thank you for helping us to learn about your school. We really enjoyed our visit. It was good to meet so many of you and to see how well you are doing. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

Your school is outstanding. You all seem to enjoy it. You are safe and extremely well cared for. We were pleased to see how well you are doing with your targets and the excellent progress you make by the time you are ready to leave school. You have many fantastic lessons and there are plenty of really interesting things for you to do both in and out of school. We saw that you enjoyed travelling through time in your time machine and that those of you who have moved to the Aveling Park site are making the most of the opportunities it offers. Congratulations, too, to the successful footballers!

Your headteacher leads the school very well and all the staff work hard to help you. Thank you to all your parents and carers who filled in one of our questionnaires. We agree with all of them who said that the school works hard to tell them about how well you are doing, but we have suggested that even more information would be helpful. It is important that everyone is clear about how much progress you are making.

I hope that you will all try your best and I wish you good luck for the future. It will be exciting when all the building work is finished!

Yours faithfully

Anne Duffy

Her Majesty's Inspector